University of Alberta

Teacher Collaboration In A Remote School Jurisdiction

By

Lucinda Diane Jenkins

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor Of Education

in

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Teacher Collaboration in a Remote School Jurisdiction* submitted by Lucinda Diane Jenkins in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Administration and Leadership.

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DEDICATION

For my parents

Gloria Mae Fralic Reinhardt

For her strength and fighting spirit, especially now

Edward William Johnston Reinhardt

For his unassuming steadfast care of us all

Thank you for your dreams,

unwavering support, and belief in me.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes how teachers experienced participation in a collaborative group project in Northland School Division No. 61 (NSD) during one school year. This provided insights into how teachers' beliefs about teaching develop and change, what changes they made in instructional practices, and how their articulated efficacy beliefs are affected by an ongoing collaborative group experience.

Although professional development opportunities are available to teachers in NSD few are tailored to the particular community dynamics in NSD. Those dynamics include language development issues and limited English proficiency of children and adults, small schools with usually one teacher for a grade or subject, geographically isolated communities with predominately Aboriginal populations, teaching assignments outside of training paths, and teaching staff mostly in the early stages of careers.

Data were collected from purposefully selected participants who were part of a collaborative project group. The four sets of interviews, each set occurring after each of four collaborative group meetings, provided rich descriptions of experiences teachers found valuable, factors they identified as necessary for successful collaboration, reported changes in classroom practices from discussions during their collaborative experiences, and how described efficacy beliefs changed. All members of the collaborative project group and all teachers new to NSD during one school year completed Gibson and Dembo's (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES).

The findings present a picture of what a collaborative experience was like for teachers in a remote jurisdiction. The study concluded: (a) small schools do not

provide the same opportunities for collaboration that activities external to a particular school can; (b) administrator support is critical to the success of such collaborative ventures; (c) such experiences contribute to an increased sense of professionalism and feeling of responsibility for student learning; (d) collaboration is a useful way to promote the development of leadership skills; and (e) a collaborative group could be a useful staff development model for jurisdictions with similar characteristics to NSD.

Directions for future research include examining the relationship between enhanced efficacy beliefs and student results, teacher expectations for culturally different students, and the link between teacher leadership skills and school led activities.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Nothing new that is really interesting comes without collaboration.
James Watson, Nobel laureate, co-discoverer of the double helix

...instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling –block in the way of action, we think of it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all
Pericles

Teaching is much characterized as a profession where its members work in isolation. The vision of a teacher, the lone adult in a classroom of children, was a common stereotype of the way in which teachers went about their work. A visit to many classrooms today would dispel this vision. Classrooms, particularly elementary classrooms, typically contain a number of adults working with children in various roles--as teacher assistants, as assistants to students with special needs, as parent volunteers. A closer look, however, indicates that although the physical isolation from other adults is not the prevalent model of classrooms at present, the psychological and intellectual isolation of teachers from other members of their profession in classrooms and in schools continues to exist.

In Alberta the large urban centres--Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Red Deer--tend to influence how educational practice is viewed in the province as a whole. These centres have school jurisdictions with a variety of school sizes and configurations. Professional development and the implementation of new curricula, new policies, or new jurisdictional initiatives, are more easily managed because of close geographic distances, the size of schools, and the sheer numbers of teachers in the same grade or with the same interest. Teacher isolation, as a psychological and intellectual

barrier to professional growth and collaboration, may still be a factor, but it is not compounded by geographic isolation as well.

Much of Alberta is rural. With the amalgamation of school districts that took place in the early nineties, some boards have schools scattered across large geographic ranges. None have a mandate similar to that of Northland School Division No. 61.

> Northland is unique because of its geographic size. It is unique because of its responsibility for all unorganized territory in the northern half of the province. It is unique because of the communities and children (small, geographically remote hamlets and villages, schools on Federal First Nations Reserves and Provincial Metis Settlements, predominantly students of Aboriginal descent) we serve. (Northland School Division No. 61, August 1999)

Teacher isolation in Northland School Division No. 61 (NSD) is a physical factor, as well as a potential psychological and intellectual isolation factor. Schools range in enrolment from 11 students to 421 students, with grade configurations including K-6, K-9, K-12, and 7-12. Of the present 25 schools in the jurisdiction, only 5 schools have organizational plans where student numbers permit more than one class of the same grade. Professional isolation becomes a very real concern when there is only one teacher of a particular grade in the school, and the nearest teacher who teaches the same grade is 50 km away over a gravel road!

This unique configuration and physical isolation of teachers in remote geographic areas indicates a need for creative solutions to teacher support and professional development. In most cases, it is not possible to bring together a group of teachers for an after school meeting on a new curriculum implementation, or new instructional policy or technique. Most frequent professional development opportunities are those of a formal nature: the annual teacher convention or a trip out to a conference in a major center. Research on school climate and school improvement suggests that many of the

professional needs of teachers can be addressed within the confines of the school building (Murphy, 1997, Sparks & Richardson, 1997). With the trend towards school improvement, school reform, and site based management, many schools are moving away from large district staff development models to site-specific activities (Friend & Cook, 2000).

Even though the trend is towards school based staff development (Little, 1999), there is a critical staff size that promotes site-specific activities In small, remote schools, staff turnover is high. When new staff arrive at a school, there is much to learn about the mechanics of the new teaching situation before teachers can begin to consider appropriate staff development activities for the school. It is not unusual for the majority of teachers to be in the first years of their careers. The opportunity for collaboration within the school, consultation, or the chance to talk over how a lesson went with a colleague does not occur easily. Supervision of students, extra-curricular activities, or personal business often prevents lingering over a cup of coffee in the staff room and discussing how the day went or what should be planned for the upcoming inservice day. Many teachers do not view the brief exchanges over the copy machine, or in the hall as collaborative opportunities.

Context of the Study

I am a teacher. I have worked with teachers since I began my career in the teaching profession. As a classroom teacher, I have worked with many teachers over the years in small remote schools. Some years the schools would have enough seasoned teachers and new staff to provide good support to each other. Other years, I was the one of the few

returning staff, and the year was spent more on orienting new staff to the school and the community, than on supporting professional and classroom concerns.

I am also, by job title, a Pedagogical Supervisor in the jurisdiction in which the research was conducted. A heady title, but what does it mean? Pedagogy, as defined by Canadian Oxford Dictionary (1998), is the art and science of teaching. Supervisor, in my jurisdiction, as in many, has more to do with the organizational chart and reporting lines, than with supervision in the sense that Glickman (1995) uses it. A supervisor, according to Glickman, refers to "any person involved with supervision, not to a particular title or position" (p.7). Supervision is any action that assists teachers to improve instruction. Viewing my job title from this perspective makes sense in terms of my actual duties, as a mentor, advisor, and supervisor to teachers beginning their careers and to experienced teachers new to NSD. I see my role as assisting teachers in any way I can to improve instruction for students. I learn from teachers in the schools, and I share this knowledge with other teachers.

My interest in working with teachers has been sustained over the years by the opportunities teachers find to gather together and plan units of study or receive updates and information on new curricula and programs. Aside from the obvious social implications of gathering over a potluck supper, I noticed how teachers found it easier to deal with issues when they tackled them as a group rather than on their own. If the same group was able to meet on more than one or two occasions, a sense of trust often developed among individuals, and a professional relationship was created that continued after the original purpose of the meetings had stopped.

Another experience that piqued my interest is a project being undertaken in NSD. Like most jurisdictions in Alberta, improved student achievement is a desired outcome stated in school improvement plans (Alberta Education, 1995) for schools in the jurisdiction. In recent years, assisting teachers with efforts to improve student results as measured by the provincial achievement tests has been a major focus of my duties. NSD students seemed to do better on the parts of the tests that reflected actual student work--the writing assignments on the language arts tests. For myself and other staff, it has long been a dream to develop some type of performance-based test that was pertinent to the needs and interests of rural and Aboriginal students, and based on outcomes common to provincial curricula.

The opportunity to realize this dream came through a project to improve student achievement undertaken by teachers and administrative staff within the jurisdiction and staff from Alberta Learning. In 1998-1999, this project initially involved writing performance assessment tasks in language arts and mathematics for all grade three and grade six students within the jurisdiction. Teacher response was so favorable that the project expanded to grades two and five in 1999-2000, and to grades four and seven in 2000-2001. The teacher response, to what I thought might be viewed as extra work and more assessment, was gratifying and overwhelming. Many teachers who came to the project initially were quite discouraged over the student achievement statistics, and showed little optimism that they any had power to impact those results. The tension between what students know and can do in performance work in the classroom, and the way in which knowledge is measured and assessed on provincial tests is irresolvable for many teachers. Factors such as, socio-economic conditions in the community, level of

parent education, and community attitudes towards education, are beyond the control of school personnel, but are believed to impact student achievement. Working together, designing performance assessment tasks, discussing curricular outcomes and classroom strategies, materials, and the plethora of small happenings that make up a teacher's day seemed to provide a climate and atmosphere that had a noticeable effect on teacher beliefs about student achievement and their impact on it. What happened to renew or create this change in teachers' feelings about their influence on students and student achievement results?

I believe this change occurred because of several things. I believe the experience of working in a group, over time, enhanced teachers' beliefs in their ability to teach their particular students. The sustained interaction with the same people allowed individuals to get to know each other, and led to trust and mutual professional respect. Comparisons of classroom practice enhanced efficacy because confirmation that strategies, methods, and materials are consistent with other teachers and other schools assures teachers they are doing the right things for their students. Hearing that others face the same dilemmas as you do, and discussing ways of dealing with teaching and learning situations, encouraged teachers to persist with difficult tasks, try again tasks they were unsuccessful with, or keep working with successful ones. The atmosphere created by collaboratively working on tasks that relate directly to ongoing work in classrooms promotes teacher growth, enhancing and refining instructional skills. Hargreaves (1994) contends that the confidence that comes from sharing, leads to a readiness to experiment and take risks, and a commitment to continuous improvement by teachers as a part of their professional responsibilities.

I believe this renewed belief in themselves had to do with efficacy. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as situational specific and not identifiable in general terms. Gibson and Dembo (1984) distinguished efficacy relating to teachers to include *teaching efficacy*, any teacher's ability to affect change is limited by external factors, and *personal teaching efficacy*, self-efficacy specific to teaching: the situation of teaching. Many researchers (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Guskey, 1981; Ross, 1995; Smylie, 1988) since have explored various facets of the efficacy construct. Very little information exists on the role of social support in developing, supporting and modifying efficacy beliefs (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). I believe it is the social support found in the workings of the collaborative group that may support, modify and enhance efficacy beliefs of teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to describe how teachers experienced participation in a collaborative group project, designing, writing, implementing, and delivering performance assessment tasks to selected grades in Northland School Division No. 61 during one school year. The study also explored insights into how teachers' beliefs about teaching develop and change, and how their efficacy beliefs are affected by an ongoing collaborative group experience.

Significance of the Study

A study of this nature is important for several reasons. Although professional development opportunities are available to teachers in NSD, few are tailored to the particular community dynamics experienced by teachers in Northland. Those dynamics include language development issues, limited English proficiency of both adults and

children in the community, small schools, geographically isolated communities, with predominantly Aboriginal populations, teaching assignments which can be outside of teachers' training path because of the small size of schools, and distance from support services and major centres.

The reflections and insights from teachers involved in this study provided new knowledge on what this experience is like in the setting described for the teachers involved and how this compares and contrasts with what is presently known and documented in the literature. I hope that the insights and descriptions provided by the teachers will direct the beginning of a model for similar collaborative undertakings in small schools, either geographically remote, or with Aboriginal populations.

Importance of the Study

With the focus in Alberta on accountability and on improved student results, many jurisdictions are struggling with ways to provide the skills and tools teachers need to help students obtain the results parents and government are demanding. Band run schools, rural jurisdictions, and school districts with significant numbers of English Second Language students may be interested in the findings from this study.

While the move toward collective efforts, cooperation, and collaboration is certainly present in the educational literature, not much is known about how social interaction supports and enhances teachers' belief systems. I believe this study provides important information in this area.

With many boards concerned about an impending teacher shortage, it will be crucial to find better ways within schools and school systems to nurture, support, and

modify teachers' beliefs in themselves, and provide useful professional development opportunities that fit with teachers' work lives.

There is keen interest from federal Indian reserves, band-run schools, and provincial schools in situations similar to NSD, in the process of performance assessment task development and its effect on student achievement.

While this project has been very much a partnership with two branches of Alberta Learning, Regional Services Branch and Student Evaluation Branch, now known as Learner Assessment Branch, and NSD, it was long a desire in the jurisdiction to develop some local assessment programs. It was NSD staff observations of trends in student data that generated the interest from the provincial departments. I have spent my career with NSD. I have seen many ideas tried in the jurisdiction, and many success stories go down the road to southern jurisdictions as personnel leave the north for jobs in the south. NSD has always had hardworking, innovative administrative staff and teaching staff, who have tried many novel and successful strategies over the years. Perhaps it is the sense of mental isolation that often accompanies physical isolation, the strong notion that one does what needs to be done to get the job done, or the transience of staff, but few of these successful strategies have been documented as successful NSD strategies. While I fully acknowledge the assistance provided by Alberta Learning, I would like this project, this research, and the findings, recognized as the work and ideas of Northland School Division No. 61. I believe recognition and acknowledgement that staff is doing something right in the north is long overdue. It was a fervent desire of mine to rectify this by carrying out this research and disseminating the findings as broadly as possible.

Although the directive to form partnerships was circulated around government departments, and incentives attached to the formation of partnerships, few successful partnerships have developed. I hear rumblings from Alberta Learning that this project is unique in government departments, and attracting accolades to both participating branches for their work. I have no wish to take all the responsibility; Northland is skilled in sharing expertise. I wish to see the jurisdiction and staff recognized for the work they do and be recognized provincially as cutting edge, and not a poor country cousin

Statement of the Problem

In the children's book, *The Little Engine That Could,* as the chant, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can" is repeated, sure enough the little engine can. Much in the way of this children's story, teacher efficacy seems to be influenced by a strong feeling that if teachers believe that they can do the job of teaching, they, in fact, can, and do it well, and leads to the posing of this research question.

How do teachers experience participation in a collaborative project group and how are their beliefs about teaching affected?

The following questions will guide the study:

1. While participating in a collaborative group project, what experiences were valuable to teachers and why were they valuable?
2. How was the experience of participation in a collaborative group project different for *experienced* teachers than for *inexperienced* teachers?
3. What factors are necessary for successful collaboration for teachers whose workplace is a small remote school?
4. What changes do teachers report in their classroom practice because of the collaborative group experience?
5. How do teacher efficacy beliefs change with participation in a collaborative group project?

6. What changes occurred in efficacy beliefs as measured by the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES)?

Definitions

Experienced teachers for the purposes of this study are defined as teachers with five or more years of classroom teaching experience.

Inexperienced teachers for the purposes of this study are defined as teachers with four or fewer years of classroom teaching experience.

Collaborative project group is a group of teachers working together jointly for the purpose of designing, writing, implementing, and delivering performance assessment tasks.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature related to the process of teacher collaboration. This chapter examines: (a) the nature of efficacy and efficacy related to teachers, (b) collaboration and the kinds of collaborative experiences that occur in schools, (c) models of supervision, and (d) a conceptual model of the link between efficacy and collaboration. Chapter 3 provides a description of, and a rationale for, the specific methods employed in this qualitative study. The third chapter describes the (a) research design, (b) data collection and analysis procedures, (c) and the procedures and safeguards imposed to ensure methodological rigour. Chapter 4 describes the research context. It provides a profile of the jurisdiction and includes (a) the historical background to the establishment of Northland School Division No. 61, (b) present day operations, (c) a description of the communities, schools, and participants. Chapters 5 and 6 describe the findings. Chapter 5 begins with a descriptive account of the collaborative group context and the organization and duties

of the collaborative working group studied. Both chapters make extensive use of quotations drawn from the series of participant interviews to support the findings as they relate to the research questions. Chapter 7 provides discussion of the findings in relation to the literature presented in Chapter 2 as well as a review of other literature that emerged from the findings. Chapter 8 provides an overview of the study, presents conclusions drawn from the study, and poses recommendations for practice, policy, and further research. It closes with my personal thoughts and reflections concerning the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A literature review, according to Rudestam and Newton (1992), should clarify the relationship between the study and previous work in the topic area. Strauss and Corbin (1990) maintain that in qualitative studies, the literature review should identify variables and describe the interaction. With the caution that research needs to be approached with an open mind, not an empty mind, this literature review will provide background to the key areas explored in the study. It begins with a review of the teacher efficacy literature. The teacher supervision and clinical supervision literature is reviewed, focusing on the improvement of teachers' skills and knowledge. Next, various coaching and mentoring models are discussed. Then, the collaboration literature is reviewed. Tracing these topics led to the proposal of the conceptual model that provided the focus and framework for the study.

Patton (1990) states that in a qualitative study, the literature review may take place at various points in the study, including the analysis of the data or the conclusion of the study. I anticipated that the school improvement and school renewal literature, effective schools literature, research in site-based management and processes of educational change might need to be drawn upon as the study and analysis of data unfolded. I believe the analysis and interpretation of the data to be a more appropriate place for the discussion of these topics, and a discussion of the role of the principal in school based collaboration. Thus, I chose to introduce and discuss them and the understandings they contribute to collaboration in a collaborative project group in Chapter 7.

Efficacy

Definitions

Definitions of these terms by various researchers vary. Following are the definitions I use in subsequent discussion regarding efficacy:

Personal efficacy (self-efficacy): the conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour required to produce the outcomes.

Personal teaching efficacy: the expectation that one will be able to bring about student learning.

General teaching efficacy: the belief that teachers as a group are able to bring about student learning.

Background

Two RAND studies (Armor et al., 1976), drawing on the work of Rotter (1966) first established the concept of teacher efficacy, or "the extent to which a teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance" (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977, p.137). Bandura (1977, 1982, 1986, 1997) proposed that teacher efficacy is a kind of self-efficacy: the belief people have about their capacity to perform a given action or task. Self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by how much effort people will expend, persistence in the face of obstacles, resilience in dealing with failure, and stress or depression experiences in coping with the demands of situations (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977, 1986) posited that self-efficacy beliefs are informed by four kinds of feedback: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, physiological and emotional arousal, and social-verbal persuasion.

Kinds of Feedback Experiences

Mastery experiences are believed to be the most powerful sources of efficacy information (Bandura, 1986). A successful performance, such as a lesson when all students complete the assigned work correctly or show attainment of the desired outcomes, can raise a teacher's efficacy beliefs and provides the expectation that similar performances, or lessons, will enjoy the same future success. Conversely, a perceived failure, or a lesson in which students do not attain expected outcomes, lowers efficacy beliefs and can lead to a feeling of incompetence. The level of emotional arousal, either anxiety or excitement, enhances feelings of mastery or failure (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Vicarious experiences are those where the skill or behaviour is performed or modelled by someone else. The more closely the observer identifies with the model, the stronger will be the impact on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). A teacher observing a mentor or colleague he or she believes is a good teacher, or has mastery of a particular teaching strategy, will likely be more influenced by observing that performance than if the model is unknown or does not have a personal connection to the observer.

Verbal persuasion can be general or specific, provide feedback on a teacher's performance, be delivered by a supervisor or colleague, or can take the role of attending a workshop or inservice. The power of the persuasion depends on the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of the persuader (Bandura, 1986). There is little work that looks at the power of social persuasion in a supported group over an extended length of time. I believe this source of efficacy information may be very powerful in influencing the sustenance, enhancement and modifying of efficacy beliefs for teachers.

Bandura (1982) believed that social persuasion alone might be limited in its power to create lasting increases in self-efficacy. However, social persuasion, such as prolonged involvement in a collaborative group, may provide a persuasive boost that allows a teacher to try a new teaching strategy, attempt once again a strategy that was not particularly successful, but has had success for someone else, or persist with difficult tasks.

Two Factors for Efficacy

Gibson and Dembo (1984) developed a 30-item measure for teacher efficacy and confirmed two factors: personal teaching efficacy, self-efficacy specific to teaching; and teaching efficacy, any teacher's ability to affect change is limited by external factors. Many subsequent researchers have confirmed the existence of Gibson and Dembo's two factors (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Burley, Hall, Villeme, & Brockmeier, 1991; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Soodak & Podell, 1993). Several studies (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Smylie, 1988; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990b; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Ross, 1995) have since explored many facets of the efficacy construct and have suggested various configurations and analysis of Gibson and Dembo's original items. Most research has supported the conclusion that teacher efficacy is an important aspect of successful learning for students. Very little information exists on the role of social support in developing, supporting and modifying efficacy beliefs (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). It is the social support found in the workings of the collaborative group that support, modify and enhance efficacy beliefs of teachers.

Teachers and Efficacy

Teacher efficacy has been studied in relation to the teacher's gender (Anderson et al., 1988), the socio-economic levels of students (Bandura, 1993; Rose & Medway, 1981), the career stage of teachers: beginning, middle, or approaching retirement (Bandura, 1993; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990), and with teachers' sense of responsibility for student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Guskey, 1982,1986). It has been examined with pre-service teachers, (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990b), with special education teachers, and teachers at specific grade levels and specific school levels, elementary, junior, and senior high (Anderson et al., 1988; Bandura, 1993; Raudenbush, Rowen, & Cheong, 1992). It has been examined as a function of level of teacher education (Ross, Cousins, & Gadalla, 1996).

"Something is going on here; it is difficult to tell what that something is" (Smylie, 1990, p. 64). Recent researchers examining the efficacy construct concur that more research needs to be conducted (Deemer & Minke, 1998; Herbert, Lee, & Williamson, 1998; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The research needs to be qualitative in nature and capture not just a numerical change on a questionnaire, but be informed by teachers' thoughts and ideas (Herbert, Lee, & Williamson, 1998; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Pajares, 1992,1997; Soodak & Podell, 1996). Research should examine the influence of factors known to effect efficacy such as collaboration, school climate, and experience and attempt to determine the malleability of efficacy and the effects of staff development activities (Soodak & Podell, 1996). By not only surveying changes in efficacy over the course of a year, but also by conducting extensive interviews with some of the teachers surveyed, this study attempted to close some of the gaps existing in the efficacy literature.

Collaboration

Definitions

The Canadian Oxford Dictionary (1998) defines collaborate as " to work jointly, especially in literary or artistic production or to cooperate traitorously with an enemy." It is the first meaning of collaborate that will be employed throughout this study. Hargreaves (1994) makes a distinction between collaboration and contrived collegiality. Collaborative relationships are "spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable" (Hargreaves, 1994, pp. 192-193). Conversely, contrived collegiality is distinguished by relationships that are "administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable" (Hargreaves, 1994, pp.195-196). While much haggling exists in theory over what really defines and describes collaboration, in practice, collaboration takes many different forms.

Collaboration in Schools

While most writers are enthusiastic about collaboration, and advocate its use, no particular group formation is suggested as superior. Collaboration is perhaps most frequently discussed as within a school or within a department in a school.

> General education teachers who used to work primarily alone now often work in grade level or interdisciplinary teaching teams with other classroom teachers, special education teachers, teaching assistants, reading specialists, speech and language therapists, and others. Although schools certainly are faced with many challenges as we begin the twenty-first century, none is as pervasive or as complex as the increasing expectation that professionals work directly with one another to educate their students. (Friend & Cook, 2000, p. 2)

Collaboration can be very effective in promoting school change and renewal, but

depends on some leadership from the principal, a university participant, or enthusiastic staff member to initiate the collaboration and encourage and manage the experience.

Collaboration as a way to co-ordinate services for special needs students is one model of collaboration referred to (Friend & Cook, 2000). Other collaborative groups reported in the literature include peers for support and collaboration in high school settings (Riordan, 1996), collaboration for curriculum development (Young, 1993), and special interest collaboration in a school, such as team teaching, peer coaching, mentor relationships, professional discussion, and scores of other small, but useful activities.

Isolation in Schools

Lortie's (1975) conclusion that teaching, compared to other professions, is an isolated and individual activity, and that this isolation contributes to the proliferation of poor teaching practices, has been supported, restated and discussed for 25 years. Ellis (1993), Hall, Hines, Bacon, and Koulianos (1992), and Little (1987) and have reported negative aspects of teaching that they attribute to isolation.

Other professions use consultation and collaboration as an integral part of their daily work. Sergiovanni (1992) advocates the use of collegial practices to address the detrimental aspects of isolation for teaching professionals. Research on training and staff development indicates that there are benefits from colleagues and peers learning together (Joyce & Showers, 1988). Collaboration promotes an increased range of possible solutions, pools knowledge from a range of professionals, provides an increased understanding of complex situations, and can involve all members of a school community or group in ensuring quality educational services for students (Welch, 1998).

Several eminent writers (Glatthorn, 1984; Glickman, 1990; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993) in the area of clinical supervision believe that collaboration at the early stages of teachers' careers may not be as useful as at later stages because beginning teachers have not yet had exposure to a range of experiences from which to draw for the necessary analysis and self-reflection. Collaboration is a learned skill and must be taught. It takes time to teach it and time for teachers to incorporate it into their repertoire of skills. Beginning teachers have not had this time.

Barriers to Collaboration

Collaboration in schools seems to be a trend (Hargreaves, 1994) that is on the rise. Little (1990) describes it as "the present enthusiasm for teacher collaboration" (p. 509). This "[present enthusiasm] appears to be driven by three beliefs about collaboration, namely, that it is more effective than traditional, individual practice, more ethically desirable, and is part of a larger social trend towards greater democratization and egalitarianism" (Riordan, 1996, p. 25). However, as a practice, it is not without criticism. The critiques are centred on implementation, the true meaning of what it is to collaborate, and the mystique of teacher individuality.

Collaboration takes time. Many schools do not have timetabling options that permit co-planning time or collaborative time built into the schedule. This is particularly true for small schools, as they are less likely to have common preparation time, planned curricula implementation activities, or funding for substitute teachers that larger schools are able to provide (Young, 1993).

Collaboration can mean different things to different teachers. Although collaboration can take many forms as discussed above, talking together or working together in some way is the thread that binds most collaborative activities.

Little (1990) describes a continuum for collaborative relationships ranging from scanning for ideas and resources, to joint work. What distinguishes the continuum is the degree of teacher independence at stake as a teacher moves from talking about materials and classroom happenings, to working together on a common project. Little autonomy is relinquished in sharing ideas and materials. Joint work requires interdependence between teachers, and a sharing of knowledge and uncertainties that some teachers are uncomfortable with.

Clinical Supervision

Background and History

Clinical supervision was conceived as a means of fostering teacher growth and development through discussion, observation, and analysis of teaching "in the clinic of the classroom"(Cogan, 1973, p .ix). The emphasis was on the relationship between the teacher and the supervisor, bound in a relationship that can bring about reciprocal exchanges, with the common goal of enhanced student learning (Grimmett & Crehan, 1992). Writers and practitioners of clinical supervision claim that the beliefs, values and procedures that are in operation in clinical supervision are consistent and supportive of the beliefs, values and procedures of collaborative ventures. Others (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1989; Little, 1987; Smyth, 1989) argue that the hierarchal relationship of a teacher and a supervisor removes the mechanism of working as true colleagues, and thus is more

a situation of "teacher inspection" (Smyth, 1989), or contrived collegiality, than that of collegial collaboration.

Models of Clinical Supervision

Several models have evolved from the original clinical supervision model first proposed by Cogan. Cognitive coaching, as described by Costa and Garmston (1994) has three goals. They are to establish and maintain trust, to facilitate mutual learning, and to enhance growth of the individuals involved in the coaching process. Coaching pairs of teacher-teacher, principal-teacher, or principal-principal can exist. Costa and Garmston (1994) offer several compelling reasons why teaching professionals would devote time, out of busy schedules, to the process of building a coaching relationship.

"Cognitive coaching enhances the intellectual capacities of teachers, which in turn produces greater intellectual capacity in students (Costa & Garmston, 1994, p. 6). Put simply, learning begets learning, and contributes to intellectual growth, which is a desired outcome of schooling.

Without some kind of sustained reinforcement and training, few inservice or training sessions for teachers achieve much effect. Guskey (1986) listed continued feedback and follow-up as imperative to sustained teacher change. When coaching becomes part of a plan of staff development, classroom application and success with innovations reaches the 90 percent level (Costa & Garmston, 1994).

Effective teamwork does not come naturally to all members of the team. "Cognitive coaching provides a safe format for professional dialogue and develops the skills for reflection on practice, both of which are necessary for productive collaboration" (Costa & Garmston, 1994, p. 8). By teaching and modelling effective collaboration in

pairs, the techniques learned pave the way for larger scale collaboration with colleagues in the school.

Culturally Different Communities

The NSD student population is mostly of Aboriginal heritage. Several studies (Gall & Gall, 1976; Jackson & Cosca, 1974) have noted differences in teacher discourse patterns in teaching ethnically different students. Cultural and socio-economic differences between teachers and parents may contribute misperceptions on the part of teachers. Lightfoot (1978) identified this in writing about black parents and white teachers, but the insights could be considered for Aboriginal parents and culturally different teachers as well:

> Despite the passionate and often unrealistic dreams of parents, teachers continue to view them as uncaring, unsympathetic and ignorant as to the value of education for their children and unconcerned about their children's academic success in school. Often they [teachers] perceive the parent's lack of involvement in ritualistic school events and parent conferences as apathy and disinterest and rarely interpret it as the inability to negotiate the bureaucratic maze of schools. (p. 166)

Since Northland schools serve predominantly Aboriginal students, and teachers are mainly of European heritage, some of the feelings of frustration on the part of teachers may be attributable to these misperceptions.

Knapp, Adelman, Marder, McCollum, Needels, Padilla, Shields, Turnbill, and Zucker (1995), in their discussion of how teachers respond to differences in student background, use the terms "constructive" and "non-constructive" to differentiate between teachers who assume responsibility for student learning for all students, regardless of their cultural background, and teachers who shift the responsibility to others. They state:

> Teachers who respond constructively believe that students can learn. Non-constructive teachers begin with the assumption that students are inherently

> limited in their ability to learn because of their background. ...Teachers who respond actively to students' backgrounds believe that they understand the important characteristics of the cultures and world experiences of the children they are teaching and they use teaching strategies that reflect their convictions. (p. 35)

Knapp et al. (1995) go on to state that the more teachers understand, acknowledge, and incorporate their understanding of students' differing cultures into school subject matter, the more likely students will be to engage and benefit from academic learning.

Summary

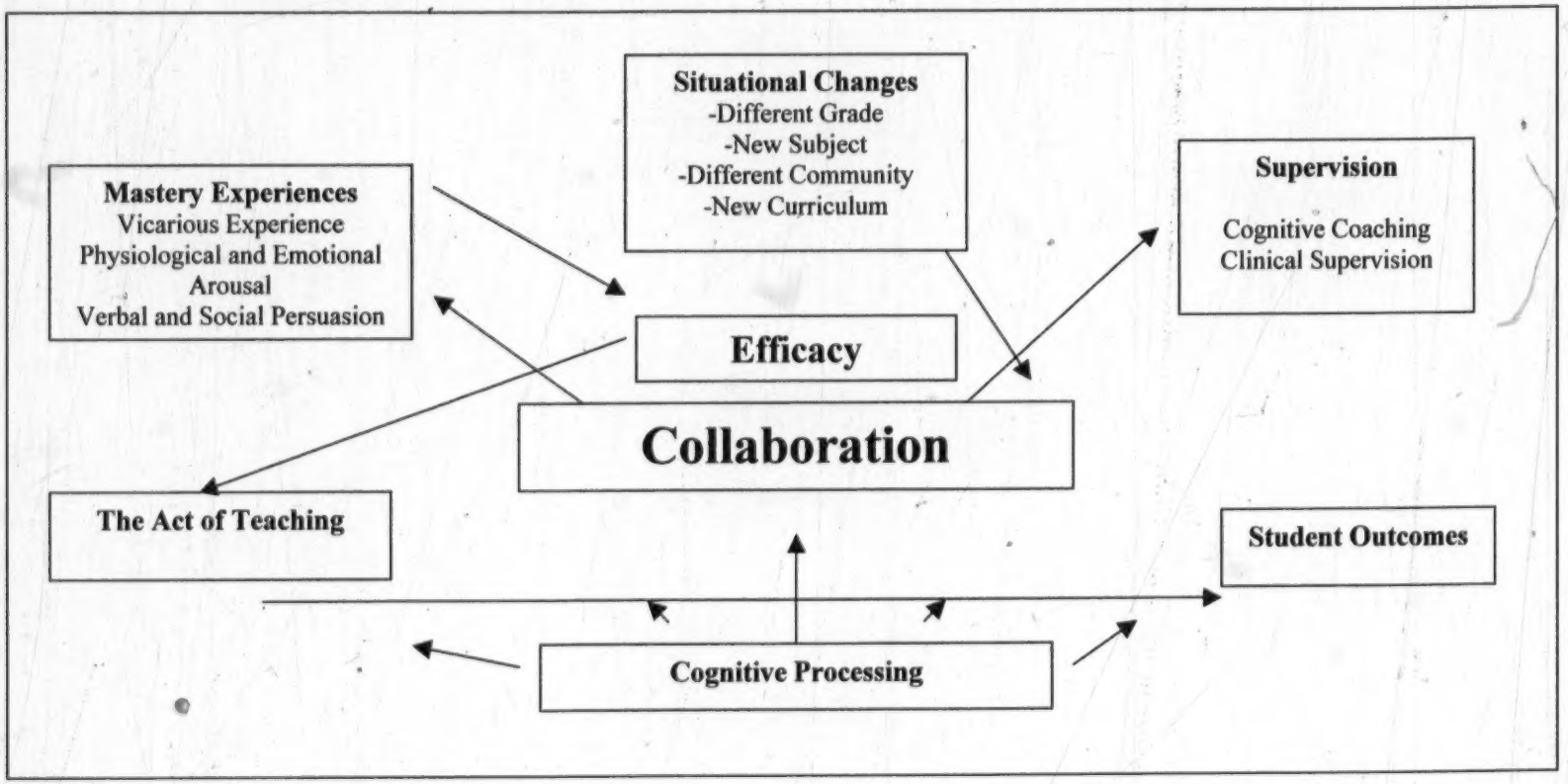
Teacher efficacy has been and continues to be a topic that attracts and sustains scholarly interest. How collaboration enhances, sustains or stabilizes efficacy over time and in a group setting is an area deserving of more study. Most studies have been quantitative in nature and I have found no reports of studies that have used a research setting such as this study. The consideration of such a collaborative group as a model for staff development and professional growth enhances and extends understanding from clinical supervision models. Participation in a collaboration group over a sustained period of time leads to enhancement of teacher efficacy beliefs, which in turn may lead to better instructional practice. Student learning and achievement is affected by these changes. The combination of these constructs suggests a powerful model for staff development in jurisdictions where geography and school size presently prohibit such activities.

The following figure, Figure 1.1 represents the beginning development of a conceptual framework linking the various concepts together. The purpose of **teaching** is successful **outcomes for students**. During teaching, the teacher is actively processing

cognitive information (**cognitive processing**). A good lesson (**mastery**), watching another teacher use a successful strategy (**vicarious experience**), students showing the teacher that they like being in his or her class, or parents saying their child really enjoys being in the teacher's class (**emotional or physiological arousal**) and a colleague, peer, or supervisor saying they admired that lesson (**verbal or social persuasion**) all contribute to enhancing a teacher's teaching **efficacy**. **Situational changes** (new grade, new subject, different school, new curriculum) can cause efficacy to waiver. **Supervision** can enhance efficacy but **collaboration** in conjunction with the four efficacy sources leads to growth and stability of a teacher's sense of teacher efficacy.

The next chapter discusses the methods employed to collect and analyze data in this study.

Figure 1.1 Relationship of Collaboration to Efficacy



CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

> Some set great value on method, while others pride themselves on dispensing with method. To be without method is deplorable, but to depend on method entirely is worse. You must first learn to observe the rules faithfully; afterwards, modify them according to your intelligence and capacity. (Sze &Wang 1963/1701, p. 17, as cited in Glesne, 1999, p. 3)

This chapter provides a description of the specific procedures that were followed in this study. The data collection techniques are grounded in the appropriate theoretical base, using references from the literature. The methods employed to select participants and to collect and analyse data are explained. Next, procedures used to maintain ethical considerations and techniques employed to ensure goodness criteria in qualitative research are described. The chapter closes with a description of the limitations and delimitations affecting the study.

A methodology, according to Denzin and Lincoln, (2000) is a way we gain knowledge about the world. The methods chosen to address a research question reflect the personal belief systems of the researcher. This study employed interpretive methods as the mode of inquiry. People are both the source and the object of knowledge. Undertaking research in a post-modern period dictates working from the perspective of a *bricoloeur*, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), drawing upon a variety of methods and perspectives, as they are needed to adequately address the research questions. The application of a "jack of all trades" metaphor to the choosing of data collection techniques very much reflects my personal philosophy. It does not suggest that I extend the metaphor to its completion, as I believe I selected a *bricolage* that assisted me to find

answers to the questions that I asked. I am by nature, practical and direct, and usually choose to find the means to a solution, even if it is not the most conventional way.

Truth resides in the mind of an individual. Persons see and believe what they want to see and believe, not entirely consciously, but because of the background brought to what is being observed. All life experiences contribute to the construction of truth and persons continually construct and deconstruct their personal understandings of reality. Shared understandings are developed through social interaction. Given this view of socially constructed realities, knowledge and understanding can only be shared through some agreed upon manner, most usually language, and either oral dialogue or written text. I believe that reality is constructed by combining what the researcher and the participant understand as true, and that the knowledge and the understanding come from the recombination. In terms of this study, my observations and understandings of what has worked for teachers engaged in the collaborative project group, combined with their expressed perceptions of how they gained knowledge and perceived the collaboration process, recombined to represent a socially constructed version of what teacher collaboration is like and understood in Northland School Division.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected in several ways. In qualitative research one way to ensure the trustworthiness of the data is to employ multiple data collection methods, a practice referred to by Glesne (1999) as triangulation. The purpose of methods triangulation is to not just collect data from a variety of sources; but to relate the choice of methods in such a way that the individual threats to the validity of any one collection technique are counteracted by the combination of the methods selected (Glesne, 1999; Berg, 1995).

The NSD performance assessment collaborative project group was the site for the majority of data collection and provided the pool from which the participants were selected. The entire collaborative project group participated in an initial focus group meeting to allow all collaborative group members the opportunity to be informed about the research being undertaken in their midst and to assist with development and refinement of questions. Both formal and informal interviews were conducted within this group. The personal teaching efficacy items from Gibson and Dembo's (1984) Teacher Efficacy Survey (TES) were administered twice; a pre-test in October and a post-test in May to all members of the collaborative project group as well as to all the teachers new to NSD for the 2000-2001 school year. My personal observations as a leader with the performance assessment group, conversations with group members and other jurisdictional leaders of the project group, and my thoughts, insights, doubts, and questions were recorded in a research journal.

Focus Group

During the first collaborative group meeting in September, all group members were invited to attend a wine and cheese focus group meeting for the purposes of informing all collaborative group members of the purpose and intent of the research I intended to conduct, answer any questions they had about the study, and obtain their thoughts and insights into the role of collaborative project groups. I posed some open-ended questions, a sample of which is provided in Appendix A. Proceedings were not tape-recorded but several other group leaders and I took copious notes. These notes were combined into one document and this document was used to assist in the drafting and

refinement of the first round of individual interview questions, as well as a data source in its own right.

Extended Interviews

Four rounds of extended semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with four purposefully selected members of the collaborative project group. This group was established and had been working on development of performance assessment tasks since March 1998. In September 2000, the school year in which the study commenced, teachers from grades 4 and 7 joined the group and three of the four interview participants were selected from this group. The interviews were conducted after each of the four meetings of the collaborative project group. They were usually conducted in the participants' homes or at their schools in the evenings and at their convenience. On two occasions, due to inclement weather the interviews took place the evening prior to the next meeting in a comfortable hotel suite in Peace River.

The first round of all four interviews used a prepared interview schedule, a sample of which is provided in Appendix B. While the questions were the same for all participants, many questions were open-ended, with opportunity for the participants to provide examples of classroom incidents, descriptions of teaching strategies and techniques employed, and extensive, detailed descriptions of demographics of classrooms, students, or recollections of instructional or life experiences.

After each round of interviews, themes were highlighted, and questions and directions to pursue in future interviews were mapped out. A core of questions was asked at each subsequent interview, but the remaining three rounds of interviews were semi-structured and pursued themes and ideas raised by the participant in the preceding

interview. Thus, each of the four interviews in the second through fourth rounds was tailored to the individual being interviewed.

After the first interview, the remaining three interviews served to clarify, extend, and explore ideas arising from the initial interviews. The intent was to have the participants describe the experience of participation in the collaborative group, relate changes they noticed in their classroom practice, and express changes and insights into changes in their personal beliefs about teaching.

At the recommendation of an experienced researcher at the university, rather than present a complete transcript of the preceding interview prior to the beginning of each subsequent interview, each participant was provided with a summary of the topics discussed at the previous interview for the purpose of not only verification of the interpretations that I had made, but also to allow the participants to reacquaint themselves with the topics discussed. Thus, the process of member checking was established early in the study, and continued throughout the collection of data and the drafting of the dissertation. This process was successful and allowed the participant and me to reconnect and to establish a context for the subjects being discussed, as well as clearing up any misunderstanding on my part as to what was said at the previous interview.

Interviews varied in length and lasted from one to three hours. The fourth round of interviews was the shortest, taking an average of forty-five minutes.

All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by me. The tapes were securely stored and the transcriptions were printed and stored in my research files. They were dealt with appropriately, following the research procedures and guidelines of the University of Alberta.

Data were coded and analysed into categories and themes. As each interview transcription was completed, themes were highlighted relative to the research questions. From these themes, items were regrouped into categories. These broad categories formed the basis for the description of the findings. All categories described were deemed to be of equal importance to all participants. When this was not the case, it was indicated in the findings chapters. This analysis took place as the interviews were transcribed and the summaries provided to the participants for verification, as well as after data collection stopped.

Teacher Efficacy Scale

All members of the collaborative project group (n=17) and all teachers new to the jurisdiction (n=65) in September of 2000 were asked to complete the personal teaching efficacy items of the TES (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) in September 2000, and again in June 2001. The list of new teachers was obtained from the Human Resources department of NSD and represented only those teachers who began employment in September. Teachers hired mid-way through the year were not included. To address the last research question, this scale was used to determine if beliefs in teacher efficacy as measured by this scale changed during the course of the ten-month involvement in the project. By giving the TES to teachers involved in the group as well as new teachers not involved in the collaborative group, inferences were drawn as to what change a collaborative group experience such as the one described in this study had for individual teacher efficacy beliefs.

Participants

Although some teachers have remained with the project since its inception, most teachers who participated in the project each year were new to the collaborative project group. Four teachers who were new to the group in September 2000 were purposefully selected as interview participants. Their classroom assignments, schools and communities are described in detail in Chapter 5. One teacher was new to both the jurisdiction and the collaborative project group; the others had some experience with the jurisdiction. Two were experienced, having had five or more years of teaching experience, and two were inexperienced, having completed four or fewer years of teaching.

Purposeful Selection

Two major issues are associated with the selection of participants in a qualitative study. The researcher needs to select an appropriate number of participants that will not only provide a rich enough data source to draw meaningful conclusions from the data (Rudestam & Newton, 1992), but will also permit him or her to manage the practical considerations of time and access. The selection of participants requires that

> the researcher delineate precisely the relevant population or phenomenon for investigation, using criteria based on theoretical or conceptual considerations, personal curiosity, empirical characteristics, or some other considerations (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984, p.64).

I selected participants who met the following criteria and considerations. Individuals who were new to the collaborative project group, were willing to participate and commit the time to four extended interviews over the year, were self-reflective and able to articulate their perceptions of the group process, and who were secure enough to not be over-awed by my perceived positional power in the jurisdiction. Glesne (1999)

cautions to " select only those criteria that the literature and your experience suggest are particularly important" (p.30). I relied on both sources in my selection of participants.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) point to four aspects to address in a naturalistic study. These criteria include truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. They are discussed here under terms more accurate to a naturalistic study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Because the data consisted of individual accounts of personal experiences, events, and influences, I depended on the personal integrity of the participants to relate their own beliefs and understandings of what had contributed to their understanding of the collaborative group process and the changes in their practice and beliefs since they began the experience. Prolonged engagement, the research journal, an audit trail, and member checks (Guba, 1981; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) are ways to ensure credibility. The teacher-participants were involved with the collaborative experience for a ten-month period, I maintained a research journal and audit trail, and I crosschecked for similar experiences and changes with the other participants. I also called upon a critical friend (Costa, 1993) to "ask provocative questions and offer helpful critiques" (Costa, 1993, p. 49). By providing summaries of the interviews, verification of my interpretations of the thoughts and statements with the participants, and clarification of understanding was accomplished.

Transferability

The findings may be transferable to teachers in similar situations within NSD and to educators in other jurisdictions with similar circumstances to NSD such as small schools, remote geographic locales, or Aboriginal student populations. So that others could decide on the application of the findings in this study to their particular circumstances and situations, I provided detailed descriptions in Chapter 4 of the historical background and geographic locale of NSD, the communities and schools in which the participants lived and worked, and the "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) collected during the interviews in order to provide the reader with as rich a base as possible to apply specifics of his or her particular situation. The description and analysis of events, experiences, and strategies that built and sustained the participants' beliefs and practices as a result of the collaborative experience are of particular importance in my continuing work and may be useful to others who may be engaged in similar undertakings. Although NSD is unique in several aspects, many jurisdictions in Alberta are composed of small, scattered schools. The experience gained in using the collaborative project group may be of use in similar settings. The insights gained from teachers involved may suggest a model for setting up and sustaining other collaborative groups for the purpose of teachers' professional growth. This kind of staff development model could prove very useful to school jurisdictions with concerns and situations similar to NSD's such as desire for increased student achievement, stabilized retention of teaching staff, or comprised of communities which are culturally different from the majority of the teaching staff

Dependability

An audit trail was established through the use of a research log. Tapes, transcriptions, and summaries were maintained. Reflections and on-going interpretation and recursive questioning were documented in the research log, successive drafts of chapters, and note taking through the drafting process of the dissertation. I relied on several colleagues in the university doctoral program, and colleagues in my jurisdiction who have familiarity with my area of interest to provide critique on all aspects of data interpretation.

Participants were asked to verify and validate the conclusions through a series of member checks to make certain that a shared understanding of the events related was recorded and to allow participants to exercise their veto rights if they so desired. Summaries of preceding interviews were provided prior to each subsequent interview. As each of the final four chapters was drafted, a copy was sent to each participant for review, as well as the final pre-defence version of the final chapters. One participant requested the complete interview transcripts for her series of interviews, which I provided. Another participant requested I not use even the pseudonym assigned in a particular quote due to possible anonymity issues; again, I immediately complied.

Confirmability

One way in which a naturalistic researcher can ensure the confirmability of his or her work is by practicing reflexivity (Guba, 1981). A research journal and audit trail assisted with the recording of data and in validating that what I observed and wrote was as true to the events described by the participants as possible. My position as the researcher in this instance, but also as a leader of the project team made it mandatory that

I be reflexive, check with other individuals who understood this collaborative group project, and check with participants to ensure I recorded as accurate an interpretation of events, experiences and explanations as possible. I attempted to do this as openly and honestly as I was able.

Miller (1990) raises several considerations in her discussion of power relationships in collaborative teacher research groups. She cautions that it takes time to consider and understand as completely as possible the complex intersections and layers of others' work lives. She questions the idea of status and unequal power relationships of "researcher" as contrasted to "teacher". She concludes, "we have come to believe that attempts to form collaborative communities of educators are futile unless such examinations [of unequal power relationships] become a part of the very collaborative process itself" (Miller, 1990, p. 160). I believe that the time spent both in the collaborative group, and with the individual participants was of long enough duration that we were able to understand as completely as possible the intricacies of individual work lives. Although I was the one asking the questions, questions were asked of me during the interviews and in the collaborative working group about my interest in the study and my work within the jurisdiction. I answered as honestly and completely as possible, and did not sense in any way that the teachers believed that I, as the researcher, had hidden agendas.

In their discussion of theoretical sensitivity, Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that every researcher brings his or her "own biases, assumptions, patterns of thinking, and knowledge gained from experience and reading" (p. 95) to the analysis and interpretation of data. Personal and professional experience, the literature in the area being studied, and analytic procedures themselves, all have impact. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest "to

keep a balance, [the researcher should be] asking, what is really going on here?, maintaining an attitude of scepticism toward any categories…and validating them repeatedly with the data themselves" (p. 47). I believe I used my insight and capacity to question and understand as sensitively as possible in collecting and analysing the data.

My position and reputation within the jurisdiction was an asset in building the trust with participants necessary for the collection of data. None of the four interview participants expressed any hesitation with sharing thoughts or describing happenings in their schools with me because of my position in the jurisdiction.

I am known as an advocate for teachers and a supporter of classroom staff. I enjoy a good relationship with principals and am valued by them for the assistance I provide. Because of the 26 years I have spent in NSD schools, community leaders and long serving members of NSD staffs consider my knowledge of community and cross-cultural issues valid. I have a reputation for honesty and integrity and am considered fair.

Ethical Considerations

> The responsibility of recording another's thoughts and using the information ethically and wisely is great. It is about the trust that another person gives you to record what they say and do with it as you will. It has changed my way of looking at interviewing from a method to collect information, to a sharing between individuals, with the task of responsible and sensitive use placed on me. (Jenkins, 1999, p. 9)

This study had the permission and consent of the Superintendent of Northland School Division No. 61. Approval was obtained from the Education Committee of the Board of Trustees prior to any contact with the collaborative working group. Since I did not intend to talk to students, permission was obtained readily.

Pursuant to the regulations of the University of Alberta for conducting research with human participants, a full ethics review was conducted and approval granted prior to when data collection commenced. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and pseudonyms were assigned to not only the human participants, but to schools and communities as well.

The purpose and intent of the research was explained to all participants. Written consent was obtained and ongoing informed consent was maintained. The participants were informed of their veto rights over any part of the dissertation and of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was established by avoiding any personal identifiers regarding names, school names, or place names.

With the completion of the TES, there was opportunity to sign a name, if participants so desired. Numbered surveys allowed me to link the surveys sent in September with the surveys sent in May, so that I could track individual changes in scores on the survey. Most participants signed their names and some commented on particular questions, wording, or made suggestions as to what questions I should have asked. Interview participants had the opportunity to review the completed draft of Chapters 4-8 for any potential privacy or interpretation issues. Participants maintained the right to opt out of the program of research at any time, without fear of penalty. All four participants completed all rounds of interviews and no members of the collaborative project group dropped out during the year.

Teachers new to the jurisdiction sometimes are in awe of persons holding central administrative positions. As all tasks of this committee were the mandate of all members, several days of seeing me roll up my sleeves, and write the tasks along with everyone

else, run to the photocopier, and be a working member of the team, soon broke down any imagined differences in roles. I have always been able to foster a feeling of "we're all in this together for the good of the students", and I believe I was able to maintain and promote this feeling with the members of the collaborative project group.

Limitations

The group of teachers that formed the Grade 4 and Grade 7 performance assessment groups were from all Grade 4 and Grade 7 teachers in the jurisdiction.

Grade 7 teachers, being junior high teachers, may have different views of collaborative work than elementary teachers. Traditionally junior high teachers tend to be subject area specialists, and see collaboration as specific to their subject rather than a multi-grade, across subject approach.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to the ten-month period from September 2000 until June 2001 because of time constraints and because I wanted to conduct my interviews with the same group of people during one school year of collaborative group meetings.

I deliberately sought a particular kind of participant. I selected participants that were self-reflective and able to articulate their personal understandings of the collaborative group experience and how it related to their personal practice and beliefs. .

I chose to interview participants and conduct this research in the jurisdiction I presently work for. I was familiar personally and professionally with the teaching environment and the ease of access to participants suited my time line and my research budget.

The next chapter provides a brief synopsis of the historical background to NSD, followed by a detailed description of the jurisdiction as it presently operates. The remainder of Chapter 4 introduces the reader to the participants, their schools, and the communities in which they live and work.

CHAPTER 4

PROFILE OF THE JURISDICTION, THE SCHOOLS, AND THE PARTICIPANTS

This chapter introduces the jurisdiction and provides information about the particular characteristics of the jurisdiction, the participants, and their schools. This overview is offered to assist the reader to contextualize the comments, the quotations, and the discussion that follow in subsequent chapters.

First a brief history of the jurisdiction is presented, followed by a description of the jurisdiction as it presently operates. Next a general description of communities in the jurisdiction is provided. Then the schools in which the participants teach are described, followed by a description of the participants. Information about the participants includes educational qualifications, teaching experience, current teaching duties, and reason for agreeing to participate in the collaborative group committee. Additional insights, such as personal perspectives about teamwork when provided by participants are also described. The chapter concludes with a summary and a brief introduction to the succeeding chapter.

To mask the identities of the participants, their schools and their communities in this study, pseudonyms have been used in the place of real names for people, schools, and communities. The pseudonyms have been chosen so that the name of the teacher, the school, and the community begin with the same letter.

School Jurisdiction

Historical Background

Northland School Jurisdiction No. 61 (NSD) was established by the Minister of Education in late 1960 to provide unified educational services to Aboriginal and other

children in the forested region of northern Alberta, particularly that area lying between the Peace and the Athabasca rivers north of Lac La Biche (Chalmers, 1985). At that time limited educational programs were provided for treaty students by (a) Federal government schools, which accepted Metis students as a courtesy; (b) mission schools operated by both Catholic and Protestant missions; (c) Metis Colony [now Settlement] schools financed by the Department of Education and operated by the Department of Public Welfare; and (d) isolated independent public and separate school districts providing service in local areas.

In the five years preceding the establishment of NSD, the school jurisdictions already in place in Northern Alberta were experiencing an enrolment crisis precipitated by both an overall increase in provincial population combined with diminishing infant mortality rates. These two factors exerted enrolment pressure on the existing schools in northern Alberta with several consequences. First, Federal schools, crowded with First Nations students, claimed that Metis students could no longer be accepted without formalized financial arrangements for the increased costs of facilities and staffing. Then Mission schools, similarly affected by increased enrolments and rising costs, appealed for the establishment of public school jurisdictions to share the financial burden.

By 1960, the Department of Education was involved in the operation of more than 20 northern schools, with those for children on the seven Metis colonies yet to come. Officials wanted to use a model similar to that in place in Northern Saskatchewan, one with its own professional, support, and administrative staff and organization, but without the disadvantages inherent in too close a governmental relationship.

Governance

A provincially appointed Official Trustee provided governance from 1961 until 1968. In 1968 an Order-In-Council established a seven member appointed Board of Trustees. Five members were Aboriginal, representative of communities within the jurisdiction. Two were representatives of the Department of Education. In 1981, this board was dissolved and an Official Trustee was appointed until November 1983. During this two-year period, Local School Board Committees (LSBC) were established in each NSD community. Community Relations Officers, or Facilitators were used to familiarize local elected boards with educational policies and regulations, and to assist with the transition of decision-making in education matters to the local boards.

In September 1983, the Northland School Division Act created a new Board of Trustees comprised of the Chairpersons of each LSBC. This governance structure continues to provide the people of northern Alberta with a voice in and the power to impact educational decisions for the students of Northland School Division No. 61.

Present Day Operation

Presently NSD operates schools in 25 northern Alberta communities. The board of trustees meets eight times annually and consists of a Chairperson elected from the 23-member board and the remaining 22 trustees. Central administrative offices are located in Peace River and oversee the day-to-day operations of educational services and human resources support to the jurisdiction's 25 schools.

Geographically NSD is the largest school jurisdiction in Alberta, comprising those schools and settlements outside of the provincial tax base from the Saskatchewan border west to the British Columbia border, north to the Northwest Territories and south to

roughly Lac La Biche with the exception of one school south of Grande Prairie and west of the town of Hinton.

NSD operates schools on five provincial Metis settlements, has a contractual agreement for professional and administrative services in two First Nations schools on federal First Nation reserves, and operates 18 schools in other small communities and settlements across northern Alberta. With one exception all communities are comprised of persons of mainly Aboriginal heritage.

The jurisdiction employs 232 teachers, 161 paraprofessional community based staff, 25 educational administrative staff and 70 central and field based support staff. A hot lunch program available to students in all schools employs an additional 46 persons.

A variety of housing types, which include mobile homes, bungalows, and small apartment complexes, known as teacherages, and owned by NSD, are available for rent. Teacherages are maintained in 19 communities and the maintenance of these dwellings is the responsibility of the jurisdiction. A locally based maintenance staff of 13 maintains the school plants in 23 communities.

Transportation services employ 29 local bus drivers, 6 horse drawn wagon drivers in two communities, and enter into contracts for an additional 25 bus routes. An additional 13 bus routes carry students to junior high and high school programs in neighbouring towns.

Northland Communities

Communities in which schools are located vary in population from 87 to over 4000. Two communities are "fly-in" for most of the year, with road access only in the winter months when frost conditions permit the construction of winter roads. All other schools

are accessible by paved or all weather gravel roads. Distances from major business centres vary from 30 to 270 kilometres for road-accessed communities and 80 to 250 air miles for fly-in communities.

Amenities available in most communities include health services, postal services, policing, social services, television and radio. Health delivery is usually by way of a nursing station with telephone linkage to a doctor in a major centre and a doctor visit once each week. Some communities have daily medical transport to and from medical services in a larger community. Hospital access is in neighbouring larger centres, (e.g. population greater than 2000 persons) with the exception of one community, which has its own facility. Ambulance and Medi-Vac air services are available for emergency situations.

Most communities enjoy daily mail service with twice weekly service in the others. Social services maintain field offices in three of the larger communities. For the others, social workers travel to the communities from larger centres Monday to Friday and are available on an on call basis for emergency situations. Local police service, provided by a local RCMP detachment or band police is available in four communities. Other communities access RCMP services from the detachment in a neighbouring town.

Most communities have a local convenience store where confectionary, basic supplies, and gasoline can be purchased. With the exception of two communities, banking services are not available.

The communities in which the schools are located are challenged by various socio-economic factors such as unemployment or under-employment, single-parent families, limited access to post secondary education and job training. Social welfare issues are

present to some degree in all communities served by this school district. Employment opportunities vary across the communities. In most communities employment is seasonal with jobs in the petroleum and timber industries predominating. In several communities farming and ranching are pursued. The school jurisdiction itself is a major employer, particularly in the smaller communities. In the six communities in the Fort McMurray area, many jobs are created through agreements between the local First Nations groups and the corporations involved in tar sands development.

Most communities have a cultural mixture in terms of population. Cree and Chipewyan are the largest First Nation groups. The Chipewyan communities are in the northeast part of the jurisdiction with Cree predominating in the other communities. There is one community of German Mennonites. The five Metis communities are comprised mainly of settlement members. Other communities are a mixture of status First Nations, Metis, and other immigrant cultures. Fifteen communities are located near Federal First Nation reserves. Following is a description of the four communities in which the schools the participants taught in are located.

Narrows' Landing

This economically booming community of approximately 4000 residents is located about 125 km from a large town. The population is predominantly of Aboriginal heritage, but has a significant mix of persons of immigrant heritage. The community has experienced considerable economic growth in the past five years due to the rapidly expanding timber and petroleum activity in the area. Many new businesses have started, and the population has grown as jobs are created. A large Federal First Nation reserve is

located adjacent to the community. There are numerous small businesses and government support offices located in the community.

Narrows' Landing has a hospital, indoor arena, mostly paved streets, and municipal services such as streetlights, curb side garbage collection and sidewalks. There are three schools in the community, one a band school on the Federal First Nation Reserve, and two public schools. A community college provides adult upgrading, and post secondary academic and vocational programs.

Teacherages maintained by NSD are available to staff. These housing units are mostly single-family bungalows. New housing, because of the ease of set up, is predominantly mobile homes, both single-family and "double-ender" bachelor units. Many teachers own homes in the community, as there is property available for purchase and opportunity for resale.

Rivers' Edge

This community is located in the Metis Settlement of Rivers' Edge and is home to about 1000 people. With the exception of teachers and some settlement administrative staff, the population is of Metis descent. It is about 80 km from the nearest town. Most employment on the settlement is provided by business ventures and infrastructure created by the settlement itself, NSD, and other government agencies. Some employment is available in the oil and gas industry.

There is a local community college campus for adult educational upgrading. An Aboriginal Headstart program operates in the community. The community has a modern community hall, outdoor rink, baseball diamonds, and paved streets within the core of the settlement. Most community members actively support amateur sport and many children

participate in skating and minor hockey programs in the nearest town, approximately 80 kilometres distant.

NSD maintains teacherages for the teaching staff at the school as only settlement members are permitted to own buildings or land on the settlement. These dwellings are typically mobile homes, although several single-family houses are present.

Deep Brook

This settlement of 450 people is located about 225 kilometres from the nearest centre. Most persons in the community are First Nation members. Seasonal employment is available in the timber and petroleum industries and local government agencies provide year round employment. Some residents engage in traditional trapping and fishing pursuits.

There is a local health centre with nursing service available. A local community college campus provides adult upgrading and some post secondary courses. Aboriginal Headstart is available for preschool age children. Several neighbouring communities recently contributed to the construction costs for a sports complex about 80 kilometres distant. The residents actively support sport programs provided by this community.

Housing is available for teachers maintained by NSD. These dwellings are either duplex units or mobile homes. There are few local properties for sale.

Lakeside

This community of 500 persons is located on a provincial Metis Settlement and its residents are mostly of Metis descent. Lakeside is 50 kilometres from a major centre. Many residents are farmers or ranchers and others are employed in the petroleum industry or in businesses in neighbouring centres.

The community accesses health and recreational services from nearby centres. There is a local recreational complex, a Youth Centre, and a Senior Citizens' lodge. Adult educational services are available in the community.

The owning of houses and land is limited to settlement members. Because of the proximity to neighbouring centres, all teaching staff live in other communities and commute to work in Lakeside.

Schools

At the inception of NSD, most schools incorporated were structurally substandard, equipment and supplies were inadequate, and many teachers lacked Alberta qualifications. Student attendance and achievement were inconsistent.

This picture has changed dramatically. Schools in the jurisdiction range in size from 20 to 450 students. The jurisdiction now employs qualified teachers as well as community based paraprofessional staff in a host of positions including teacher assistants, library assistants, school community liaison personnel, native language, and early childhood services instructors. Buildings are modern and well maintained, with many modernizations and building projects presently underway. Schools are well equipped in terms of materials and equipment necessary to provide full academic programs.

The schools in which the participants taught had many characteristics in common. The schools were all located in NSD's jurisdiction. Students attending the schools are of predominantly Aboriginal ethnicity; approximately one-half of the students enrolled in the jurisdiction are considered to be Canadian born English Second Language (ESL), for the purposes of funding. ESL students in the jurisdiction include both provincial and federal students. While some students considered ESL speak Cree or Chipewyan, most

of the ESL students have Cree or Chipewyan speaking parents. The grammar and usage patterns used by community members in speaking English rely extensively on the grammar and construction patterns of the Cree and Chipewyan languages. Language development issues are a major concern of educators working in the jurisdiction.

Narrows' Landing School

This large elementary school, located in the community of Narrows' Landing provides elementary programs to approximately 450 students in kindergarten through grade 5. The school employs 22 teachers and offers a school-wide music program, daily physical education, Cree language instruction, as well as a full academic program. The school has two full time administrators and has recently introduced a Safe and Caring Schools program. Narrows' Landing School is the only school in NSD of sufficient size for multiple classes of the same grade level. The timetable is constructed so that all teachers of the same grade have at least two classes per week of shared or co-planning time. Three special education teachers provide both small group pullout and inclusive special needs programming in the school. Classroom teachers teach all subjects to their students except Music and Cree language. Staffing is stable at this school, with a core of staff owning homes in the community.

Rivers' Edge School

Located on the Metis settlement of Rivers' Edge, this school provides programs to over 200 students in kindergarten through grade 9. Classroom teachers of elementary classes teach all subjects to their classes except Cree language and library skills. Special education and Early Literacy Initiative (ELI), an initiative of Alberta Learning to focus funds and special teaching efforts to students in kindergarten through grade 2, programs

are available in the school. Subject specialists for the four core subjects teach junior high school classes. Junior high students travel to a nearby school with Career and Technology (CTS) facilities for some of their option subjects. The school has a full time principal and a half time assistant principal. Students bus to a larger centre for high school or board with relatives or friends in more distant locations. Staffing at Rivers' Edge School is stable; approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of the staff are new hires each year.

Deep Brook School

The school is not on a Federal First Nation Reserve, but serves a status Aboriginal population. It is a kindergarten to grade 12 school with eight teachers. The school provides a full academic program to the 130 students. There are several single grade elementary classrooms while the remaining elementary students are taught in combined grade classrooms. Classroom teachers teach all subjects except Cree language. Subject specialists instruct junior and senior high school classes and high school classes are small. The school has a full time principal. Half of the staff were hired this year at this school; the returning staff were in their second or third year at the school.

Lakeside School

There are five teachers who provide educational services to 65 students in kindergarten to grade 6. Classrooms are combined grade except for one, and classes are small. In additional to the full academic program, the school provides an ELI program, some special education services, and Metis cultural classes. The school houses an Aboriginal Headstart program for preschool age children. The principal carries a 25% teaching load. Children bus distances of 25 to 40 kilometres to neighbouring centres to

complete junior and senior high school. The staff at the school is stable. Only one new replacement staff member was hired for the current school year.

Participants

The following section introduces the four interview participants. For this study inexperienced teachers were defined as those teachers having four or fewer years of classroom experience as a certified teacher in Alberta and experienced teachers were those teachers having five or more years of classroom experience as a certified teacher in Alberta. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the teaching experience of the participants.

Table 4.1 -Teaching Experience of Participants

Name	Teaching experience with NSD	Prior teaching experience
Nancy	1 year	6 months
Ruth	1 year	15 years
Debra	2 years	*10 years Montessori
Larry	0	10 years

*-not as a certificated teacher

Nancy

Nancy is in her second year of teaching at Narrows' Landing School that draws First Nation students from a large Federal First Nation Reserve as well as non-status Aboriginal and white students. She has a B.Ed. from a large university in eastern Canada and is one of three teachers who teach the same elementary grade in this school of over 400 students.

Prior to joining the staff at her present school, Nancy taught for six months at the band run school on the Federal First Nation Reserve on which many of her present

students live. For the purposes of this study, Nancy is considered to be an inexperienced teacher.

Nancy is secondary trained, and reported some initial anxiety about accepting a position out of her teacher training path. She found the support of the other teachers who teach the same grade at her school extremely helpful in making the transition to elementary teaching. Nancy continues to find this support gratifying. She is the only participant who has this kind of grade-level support at her school.

Nancy is enthusiastic about her work with the collaborative project group and has prepared an inservice session on her work for the staff at her school. Due to the size of her school, Nancy's activities on the committee would go largely unnoticed if she did not make a point of keeping staff informed.

The principal of the school is supportive, and the attitude of most staff is neutral toward the collaborative project group's work. Since the staff at her school is large, and she is relatively new to the school, Nancy feels privileged that she is the school's representativ in the collaborative project group. She finds the work interesting and challenging. She related:

> I was involved in the marking session and I learned so much about how I should be teaching. So when I had the opportunity to come, I was really excited.

Ruth

Ruth is a teacher with less than three years with NSD. She has taught in several different communities in northwestern Alberta during her more than 15 year teaching career, giving her consideration as an experienced teacher by definition in this study. Although she has taught in junior high school settings previously, this is her first

experience with language arts in junior high school. Ruth holds a B.Ed. from an Alberta university.

There are three junior high school teachers in her school. They share the teaching responsibilities for the three junior high grades and are subject specialists. Ruth believes all junior high school staff must present a united front to the students, share information with each other, and be cognizant of issues affecting the students and community. In a small community, it is imperative that all staff provide the same information to parents and community members and hold the same expectations for students. She explained:

> Because there are only three of us, and the community is small, I can't know something about a kid and not share it with the others because a parent might come in and talk to them and if we haven't shared our information, they could be saying one thing and I another. Then the parents are confused.

She works closely with her colleagues, but feels they could be a closer team. She is passionate in her belief in and commitment to teamwork in a school setting. Ruth has a particularly close working relationship with one of her junior high school colleagues. They meet daily for informal discussions about their students, parent contacts, and student activities. Because the workload and the responsibilities in the junior high school are shared in this way, she feels this collegial relationship is critical to her sense of doing a good job in the school.

Staff at Ruth's school is aware of her work with the collaborative project group. The principal is supportive and encouraged her to become a part of the group, but some experienced staff are critical of the work of the group. Ruth, being relatively new to the jurisdiction and in her second year in the school, is uncertain as to whether she should be influenced by other staff opinions. She decided to participate in order to find things out for herself. She explained:

> In the schools you hear all kinds of things and everyone has an opinion. I like to see things first-hand and decide for myself. That's why I went.

Debra

Debra is in her third year at Deep Brook School. Following the definitions used in this study she is considered an inexperienced teacher. She is a trained Montessori teacher and taught in a private Montessori school for 10 years before completing a B.Ed. and coming to her present location. She teaches a combined grade elementary class and is presently the most senior elementary teacher on staff.

The principal is supportive of her collaborative project group work now, but this was not always the case. The year that Debra came to Deep Brook School, all the professional staff including the principal were new to the school. With so many new staff, the predominant climate of the school was of survival as a staff in the school setting first, with outside activities taking a secondary role. While Debra had been interested in the materials produced by the collaborative project group in previous years, staff at the school was mostly unaware of the work of the committee. Debra organized an inservice session on her work at a school professional development day and was gratified by the enthusiastic response of her teaching colleagues and her principal.

Larry

Larry has taught junior high school for ten years on a Federal First Nation Reserve in a school run by the band, placing him for the purposes of this study in the experienced teacher category. He holds a B.Ed. with a secondary focus from an Alberta university. This year he has a combined grade elementary class in Lakeview School. He finds the switch from older to younger children challenging but enjoyable.

The staff at the school are experienced and supportive of Larry's work on the committee. They have a history of commitment to the collaborative group project and have had representation on the committee either as developers or markers since its inception. It was expected that he would be the school's representative on the collaborative project group. The staff are interested in his work and feel that having a representative from their school gives them an "edge" in knowing what students might be asked on the jurisdictionally administered assessments in April of each year.

The principal is also supportive of Larry's work with the collaborative project group and provides an opportunity at staff meetings for him to update other staff. Larry felt his staff worked as a team and found that the staff valued his work on the collaborative group. He stated:

> I had an idea of what it was about. Other staff had been on the committee in the past so they know what is about. …said it was good and that I would learn a lot. Oh, and be prepared to work hard! So I think they understand what I do when I go there and support me.

Summary

Northland School Division No. 61 is a geographically large jurisdiction serving mostly students of Aboriginal heritage in 25 schools ranging in size from 22 to 450 students. It has been in operation in its present structure since the passing of the Northland School Division Act in 1984. NSD serves communities ranging in population from 87 to over 4000. Services in most communities are limited, and most amenities are obtained from larger centres.

Four teachers, representing four schools from the jurisdiction participated in the study. Their teaching experience varied from a little more than 1 year to more than 15

years. None had been employed by NSD for more than 2 years. Three were elementary teachers and one was teaching junior high students.

The teachers taught at four schools in the jurisdiction, the largest of which had 450 students and the smallest represented in the study was slightly more than 70 students. Schools were all located in NSD communities. The students attending the schools were of predominantly Aboriginal ethnicity. Language development issues in the student population were of primary concern for educators.

The next chapter provides a description of the history and formation of the collaborative project group that Nancy, Ruth, Debra, and Larry were members of for the school year in which this study occurred. The experiences that they reported as useful during their collaborative project group experience and the factors they believed necessary for their continued participation in the collaborative project group are descriptively presented in this first of two chapters of research findings.

CHAPTER 5

USEFUL EXPERIENCES AND NECESSARY FACTORS

The intent of this study was to describe how teachers experience participation in a collaborative project group and how their beliefs about teaching were affected. Six questions are subsumed under this general question, with the findings related to the following sub-questions presented in this chapter.

1. While participating in a collaborative group project, what experiences were valuable to teachers and why were they valuable?
2. How was the experience of participation in a collaborative group project different for *experienced* teachers than for *inexperienced* teachers?
3. What factors are necessary for successful collaboration for teachers whose workplace is a small remote school?

The chapter begins with a description of the formation of the collaborative project group, an explanation of the kinds of tasks the group members were engaged in, and descriptions of how the smaller, grade-specific groups operated. This information was gleaned from documentary data maintained by jurisdictional personnel, interview transcripts, and my personal experiences as a leader for both the larger collaborative group and the smaller grade specific groups. This overview, in conjunction with the descriptions of the jurisdiction, the communities, schools and interview participants presented in the previous chapter will provide the reader with a context in which to place the comments and thoughts of each participant. The transferability of the findings of this study is related to the degree to which the experiences and understandings of the

participants (teachers) in this study resonate with those of teachers in similar teaching and geographic situations.

The questions are discussed through the comments provided by the participants and through descriptive accounts obtained during each of the four group meetings with the collaborative group. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings relative to useful experiences for teachers and factors identified as necessary for successful collaboration.

The Collaborative Project Group

There is time for us just to discuss what is happening in our own classrooms and in our own schools. You are working with people in the same field, the same set of circumstances. We are all isolated. Ruth

I was honoured that I was asked. But I think that with the children I teach, I've really grappled with "what is my purpose", culturally, academically, emotionally. So it's really important for me to be with people who are really experienced. Debra

Last year when I was involved in the marking, I learned so much, how I should be teaching. I learned there were lots of things my kids were doing really well, a lot of things I didn't teach well enough, and I think it is really up to me to bring it to them, to learn, to study. So when I had the opportunity to be a part of the committee this year, I was really excited because it really changed a lot of the ways I was teaching. Nancy

Purpose of the Collaborative Group

Throughout the 2000-2001 academic year, 4 two-day meetings of the collaborative group were held. The working purpose of the group was to develop performance assessment tasks for mathematics and reading. Specific responsibilities included writing tasks, editing rubrics, and constructing scoring guides and rationales for the scoring of the jurisdictional performance assessment materials. The full committee was comprised of 17 teachers representative of schools in the jurisdiction with staffs of 5 or more teachers. In schools with fewer than 5 professional staff, planned absences of 8 days were judged

by school administration to be too disruptive to the school. Table 5.1 shows the composition of the committee in terms of experience with the committee, the jurisdiction, and the teaching profession.

Table 5.1 Demographics of the Collaborative Project Group

Prior committee members	New to the committee	New to the jurisdiction and the committee	New to the teaching profession
4	10	3	0

Selection Process

Committee members were selected in several ways. Members from prior years were invited back, both as a courtesy to them and to ensure some continuity and familiarity with process and procedures from year to year. At the August school administrator meeting, principals were asked to nominate teachers from their staff who either had an interest in the work of the committee, or who the principal, with input from school staff, chose to represent the school on the committee. The teachers who form the committee were selected from the nominees, or invited, if central administration staff, of which I am one, receives insufficient numbers of nominees. Soliciting or inviting particular to teachers to join the committee may occur because a school has not nominated a teacher. It is the policy of the committee to try to have a representative from every school. In the year in which this study occurred, two teachers were sought in this manner, both in order to have representation from a particular school. Neither teacher was part of the interview participants of the study. The committee could also solicit teacher representation from a particular grade if representation from that grade was inadequate.

Grade Level Groups

The work of the committee was conducted mostly in the small grade-level groups, representing grades 2 to 6. The two grade 7 groups were subject specific to mathematics and reading respectively. Because the performance assessment materials were grade specific, the larger collaborative group split into grade level groups for most of the meeting time. While it is desirable to have one member of every grade level group with prior experience, it is not always possible to form the groups in this way. The groups all had three members, with the exception of the grade 7 subject specific groups, and two grade groups in which it was not possible to locate a teacher willing to participate in time for the first meeting. Table 5.2 shows the configuration of the grade level groups, their task responsibilities, and the number of new members to the group for the year in which the study took place.

Table 5.2 Formations of Grade Level Groups

COLLABORATIVE WORKING GROUP N=17							
Grade	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade7
Tasks	Reading and Math	Reading and Math	Reading and Math	Reading and Math	Reading and Math	Reading	Math
Total Members	n=3	n=3	n=2	n=2	n=3	n=2	n=2
New Members	n=3	n=2	n=2	n=1	n=1	n=2	n=2

Organization of Meetings

Although there was a similar pattern to each of the two-day meetings of the committee, each meeting had different tasks to complete. Meetings usually began with the full group and the leaders for greetings and agenda. A work and inservice plan for the

two-day session was outlined and discussed. As the bulk of the committee (13 members) was new to performance assessment and the process, several inservice sessions were planned to provide members with background and expertise. Inservice topics included background to performance assessment, models of assessment design (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2000), historical perspective on assessment and performance assessment in NSD, tips for scoring, and writing rationales for scoring. The inservice sessions lasted up to two hours and were usually conducted on the first day of each two-day session to provide background or specific information that would assist committee members in the session's work. The large committee would then break into the grade-level groups to complete the tasks assigned for each session.

Debriefings occurred at the end of each day, when the full group would come back together, share progress, report on any problems encountered, and outline their work plan for the next day or the next session. There was opportunity for discussion between any group members during lunch and coffee breaks. Group members usually made plans to meet in groups in the evening for a meal or social purposes. During the first collaborative group meeting a focus group wine and cheese meeting was held, which committee members viewed as a social occasion. During the third collaborative group meeting all the group members met in the evening for dinner.

Meeting Atmosphere

The collaborative project group meetings developed into noisy affairs with a productive conversational "buzz." Grade level groups spent the first meeting getting to know each other, and developing an awareness of the strengths, limitations, needs, and working styles of themselves and their group members. This process continued through

subsequent meetings, as personalities revealed themselves, and group members became familiar with and accustomed to working with each other.

Changes in the Group

The observed changes in the group over the course of the four meetings were remarkable. Interview transcripts reveal increased contact among collaborative project group members over the course of the year. Teachers were bringing materials to the meetings to share with other group members. The meetings were used as venues for information exchange of school happenings and invited events such as science fairs and sports activities. At the third meeting an exchange of email addresses and phone numbers was instituted by one grade group. A meeting was arranged by this group to take place at the annual teachers' convention. Nancy shared that,

> it was great. I spent more time with members from the group than I did with members of my own staff.

Committee members were on task, they challenged each other, and they felt freer to state opinions and disagree without fear of being ridiculed for their views than was believed possible at their respective schools. Debra explained that at her school

> they [other teachers] don't talk curriculum and they don't have discussions about strategies and…my colleagues have become competitive and unfeeling and I don't feel comfortable pushing conversation about those things.

There was increased interaction between grade groups as more meetings were held. Where initially grade groups needed prompting to move to discuss tasks and grade alignment of outcomes, by the third meeting, this happened spontaneously. At break times, more mingling between grade groups occurred as members sought out each other to take up threads of conversation from the last meeting.

Development of Roles

Roles that supported the individual strengths and personalities of collaborative project group members developed in each of the grade level groups. In each grade group, the process occurred in a slightly different manner, but similar roles eventually developed. All groups had the same kind of work to do, and all the work required knowledge of grade level curriculum, recording and revision, and some creative design. In most of the grade groups, members divided the written work equitably amongst all members. For part of a meeting one would record, or make revisions to the work at hand, and then another group member would take over. If one group member was skilled in drawing, or layout of questions, other group members recognized this ability and the task of drawing diagrams and laying out the tasks visually fell to that individual. In other groups, some members, like Larry, were very creative in terms of task construction, "the idea people", as Larry described it. This evolution and sharing of roles was supported both in the interview transcripts and from observation during the meetings.

The project facilitators, while monitoring group dynamics, encouraged groups to work through problems themselves and find their own roles. At the same time, they watched for situations where one individual could dominate thought and action and sought to intervene and suggest ways to distribute responsibility amongst all group members. Nancy described how roles developed in her group:

> I thought I had the chronic perfectionist role because I was really picky about wording. Then when we were picking exemplars, I felt you can write too; I don't have to be the only one. We all have qualities. One is very good with curriculum and the other is very patient and detail oriented and I am more visual and want it to look and sound right.

This process was not always without tension between personalities and differences in work styles and learning habits. There was much work to do at each meeting, timelines were often tight, and stress did develop due to different working styles and priorities. Group members learned to thread their way through these treacherous paths and learned something about themselves as well. Debra related her experience:

> I learned that rage is good and that you can become really creative in your rage. I was about to walk out…[Other group member] was asking good questions, but for me they weren't pertinent to what we were doing at that time.

Participants recognized that their roles and place in the group were renegotiated in subtle ways at each meeting. Larry explained how he saw his group evolve.

> In our group, people have recognized where the strengths and weaknesses are. We are more task-oriented now because I don't think we realized how much work we had to do.

Inservice Expectations

There was an expectation of the committee members to share information they gained with staff at their school. As most schools had representation on the committee, having collaborative group members report back to their school staff was an effective communication tool to keep school staffs informed of progress and procedures.

There was also an expectation that committee members would participate in inservice sessions for all grade 4 and grade 7 teachers in NSD in the year that the study occurred and any new teachers of grades 2, 3, 5, and 6 to the jurisdiction. The purpose of these sessions was to introduce teachers new to the jurisdiction to the philosophy, intent, and content of performance assessment in NSD. These inservice sessions explained the rationale for the use of performance assessment in NSD, introduced sample test items, provided the scoring rubrics and training on how to use them in classroom situations,

outlined the procedures for testing and the time lines, and provided opportunities to share teaching strategies and ideas for use in performance assessment situations. These one-day sessions, conducted prior to the annual teachers' convention for the grade 4 and grade 7 teachers, and regionally during late February to the new teachers to grades 2, 3, 5, and 6,who had not received an inservice of this nature, were planned co-operatively within the collaborative group and its leaders, but delivered by the members of the collaborative group. Of the 17-member collaborative project group, 11 members delivered inservices. Since the number of new teachers to grades 2, 3, 5, 6 requiring inservice was small, the other 5 members of the collaborative project group were not required to deliver an inservice session. All interview participants delivered inservice sessions.

Useful Experiences of the Collaborative Group

Participants identified nine experiences they believed useful to them during their collaborative group work. They were (a) the opportunity to discuss and confirm similar working situations, (b) the chance to expand individual curricular knowledge, (c) a growing sense of excitement about learning, (d) freedom to talk, (e) a feeling of being a professional, (f) time to talk and build relationships, (g) exposure to knowledge and information not held by others, (h) a sense of increased confidence, and (i) an increased understanding of the organization and workings of NSD. They are presented descriptively in this section using excerpts from the interviews.

Confirmation of Similar Working Situations

Personal information was exchanged and there was considerable comparison of students, schools, and communities. Teachers found this exchange of information confirming and rewarding. Ruth explained:

> It made me feel comfortable that our kids were doing as well as or better, but it also made me realize that we are all in the same boat.

Similarly Nancy remarked:

> It kind of gives you hope in some ways and lets you relax. When they compare kids, [in the grade group] I'm not failing miserably doing this. It was really good to just talk to people and find out things were happening in their schools too.

Sharing experiences with group members about similar community happenings and school events was reassuring for all collaborative group members. It was apparent each participant believed he or she was the only one grappling with issues such as attendance, achievement, or student motivation. The perception was these were different issues than their friends in more urban school districts were dealing with. While all the collaborative group members had teaching colleagues in other jurisdictions, the experiences and conditions were not similar to those experienced by many other teaching staff in NSD. Ruth explained

> when I talk to [my group partner] I realize we're not any different than what they are in some of the other [NSD] schools and that is encouraging for me. …It's having a place to go where you can talk to people who understand. I can't really talk to the teachers back home about this because they don't really understand. Talking to others who are working with this set of circumstances is much more beneficial.

For Debra it was valuable to "be with people who were really experienced" since her experience in her school was with a group of teachers like her, with less than five years of experience.

Expansion of Curricular Knowledge

The opportunity to discuss curricular issues was particularly valuable to all participants. The topic was raised repeatedly in the interviews. For Larry, the opportunity to discuss curriculum with other teachers of his grade was invaluable. He commented, "I got the curriculum more in depth. Now I realize I was teaching above what I needed to be teaching [for my grade]. For Ruth, as for Larry, coming from experiences outside of her current teaching assignment, the gain in curricular knowledge was tremendous.

> I'm *not* a junior high person and I know [grade group member] has a large background in language arts and lots of experiences. Part of my agenda was to learn as much as I could from whoever was there to teach me. There is expertise and I wanted it.

Excitement About Learning

All of the interview transcripts conveyed an excitement about learning. The new learning for group members was focused in two directions: new learning that would enable them to do a better job of teaching students and new learning that would benefit them professionally. Certainly new learning to assist students would also help teachers to grow and develop professionally. Not discounting that aspect of learning, teachers did distinguish between some of the new insights they gained, seeing it as knowledge that would be viewed by peers or prospective employers as desirous.

Discussions in the group prompted Larry to

> try a lot more predicting. I've been trying to get the kids into their own personal thinking and get rid of one-word answers. We did some Venn diagrams to try to give them the idea of comparing things. Without this group, I would not have thought to try Venn diagrams with my elementary kids. I used to do them in Grade 7.

Nancy explained how confusing and overwhelming it can be to be a beginning classroom teacher, responsible for planning and delivering instruction in five or more different subjects.

> When you are a new teacher, and they give you 15 binders … This really helps to get focused and it has helped me become more specific and focused on goals…Instead of "this is a nice activity," to "what does this activity do for my kids and how does it fit into my plan." It's helped me be better at knowing what I'm doing--teaching.

The meetings and the information discussed provided opportunities for group members to explore areas of professional knowledge that they had not been exposed to previously. Debra found the group meetings ideal for her expanding personal interest in assessment. She shared:

> This is exciting stuff. I may not always be here and this stuff on backwards design is going to be very useful, not just now but in the future.

Larry saw a benefit professionally both in the contacts he made for future work in other schools and in the opportunity the collaborative group provided for present and future networking.

> I think it's a huge benefit in terms of the people you meet. You see them at convention and if I weren't doing this I would only know people from my school.

Freedom to Talk

Teachers commented about the freedom they felt to discuss, debate, share opinions or disagree on a myriad of topics, not just topics related to professional issues. Within their school staffs, teachers believed they were committed to a particular point of view

once they had stated it. After they had expressed some opinions, shared views on educational issues, or adopted a particular stance, they believed they could not change this stated opinion or point of view. Since they only saw the members of the collaborative group away from their schools and communities, it seemed as if they felt they did not have to live with the consequences of opinions or controversial positions. Debra described life as part of a school staff as being

> like a house. Everything is familiar and it can be static and routine. I'm not confident in sharing all my thoughts within my school culture because when I come here and I share with you [researcher] or with the others, I don't have to work with you or I don't have to impress you or I don't have to know you disagree with what I said yesterday in the staff room every morning for the next three weeks.

Nancy appreciated the opportunity provided to discuss educational issues that mattered to her with members from the group. She found it

> nice meeting with adults who are high minded, [e.g. erudite and professional discussion. Confirmed with Nancy] interested and can talk about stuff like the educational system and children and… do you think that it is right or wrong that kids should wear uniforms to school and especially working in a northern community where some might have Nikes and the other has none.

Nancy contrasted this with a description of conversation in her staff room.

> Here at the school, I see some teachers …well that is their opinion and you know how they stand on it. So you really don't want to go too far with it. You have to work with them everyday, so it's better to just not have an opinion at all. …It's just that with the people you are with every day, you might not want to be labelled.

Ruth's experience was different. Not all staff members at her school were supportive of the work of her committee. She related:

> I don't like negativity. The minute I said I would do this, I was hit by negativity in our school. So I can go here and find out for myself.

Beleaguered Professionalism?

Teachers appreciated being part of a group that all agreed made them feel professional. Community and societal perceptions of teaching as a profession had some influence on opinions, as did individual beliefs about teaching, and the understood beliefs of school staffs about professionalism in the schools. For Ruth teaching is a calling, and not just a job or her profession. She explained that

> there are teachers who are born to teach and there are teachers who are made and I prefer the ones who are born because they don't look at it like a job.

It seemed as if professionalism in schools might be a façade that is maintained on the surface, but not believed in deeply. Debra shared how she felt more patient with the people in her group than she did with some staff at her school. She explained that she is

> much more patient with other peoples' idiosyncrasies and their learning than I would be in my school. I think it's being over here [in the Peace River collaborative group]. It's the first time I've been in a professional environment where I've had to maintain my professionalism and that's really important because if you are going to maintain your professionalism, you tend, or at least I tend to look at things more objectively.

Larry's sense of his own professionalism was based on his belief in himself. He acknowledged some societal beliefs about teachers and their work that caused frustration for him. He explained:

> Teachers aren't, I don't think, viewed as professionals. They are professional like lawyers and doctors; they are not viewed the same way. Teachers have assumed a lot of roles …my grandmother was a teacher in a one-room school in the 40's. All they did then was teach. Parents provided the discipline. You weren't a social worker and a parent and a moderator and all those jobs that society deems the school should do right now.

He went on to make a distinction between how other school staff view teachers and the view of teachers held by his community. He believed community staff working at the

school viewed teachers as professionals and appreciated them for the work they do but others in the community did not always view teachers in a professional light. He mentioned banter in his community about "shopping days" at teachers' convention time and remarks about teachers having lots of "time off." In small remote communities, teachers are often the most highly paid individuals in the community and some individuals marginalize the work teachers do because they work with children. He continued:

> I don't think the people in the community see us all the time as professionals. I think it has to do with money. I work long hours and a lot of people don't understand the intensity of your work. I base my success on whether I have a boy who starts my grade and doesn't know all his letter sounds and he knows them when he leaves. I base my success and my own feelings of if I am a professional on things like that rather than if parents think I am a professional or whether I am working hard enough.

Coming from the largest staff, Nancy implied that a sense of professionalism might waver at her school. She used the example of her arrival as a new staff member to her classroom.

> I'm the new kid on the block and I honestly wonder how the teacher made it last year. I don't want to be unprofessional, but I walked into the classroom and there's no science books, no math, no language books… what did [the teacher] use last year? I was reduced to going to the other classes and begging. I don't think its' intentional, but…

Nancy felt that going away from the school was linked to her own feeling of professionalism. She explained:

> I like it when we have conferences because it makes you feel professional. You get away and talk to people and come back a little refreshed and excited, with new ideas.

Time

Time was mentioned repeatedly as a commodity that set the work in the collaborative group apart from work in a school. Both the opportunity to discuss the work underway, and the opportunities to discuss subjects of professional and personal interest without interruption of normal school routines and responsibilities were judged as highlights to the collaborative group experience. Being away from supervision duties, the need to prepare for the next class, and the constant demands and requests made of teachers by students and other staff in the course of a school day was welcomed by participants.

While participants identified the time to talk, the time to discuss, and the time to visit, it appears that what they valued was opportunity to build relationships in a working environment. Interviews show that participants believed they had richer opportunities to develop these relationships at the collaborative group meetings than they did at their schools and they identified time as the commodity that allowed this to occur.

Ruth explained how lack of time and the busy nature of a school day precluded the development of relationships in a school. She described it this way:

> There are lots of people on a staff you really don't know anything about once they leave for home. I mean I *know* just about everybody and I know them well enough to know if they are having a bad day but I'm not sure I'm always empathetic to that [the bad day]. I think it's time.

The amount of time spent in close contact in the grade groups allowed relationships to develop more quickly than they might in a school. Ruth reflected:

> I feel as comfortable with [group member] as I feel with people on my staff after the years I've been at the school. I haven't spent as much time [compared to time at school], but it is intimate time and you're closer together in a shorter time whereas at school you get to know people gradually because it's day by day. Sometimes I don't *see* a staff member for a week… It was a deeper reunion here.

Another aspect of time was the opportunity to be valued and appreciated as a person and not only as "the grade 2 teacher." Debra described it as personhood.

> It's been helpful in reminding me that my personhood is important. Like [a group facilitator] came up to me today and said, "What books are you reading?" I don't hear teachers [at my school] saying that to me, not just about books but just my life- what makes it interesting. I think we need to talk about other things to make ourselves appreciated, not just professionally but … the interests of other people. You see them, as more than just teachers. There's what is important in their lives. Personhood is really important.

Knowledge Not Held by Others

Teachers enjoyed being "in the know" about issues and subjects that were not yet available to teachers in their school. Larry enjoyed "the chance to be the first. It's nice to know things ahead of everyone else and to know where the school division is going." Teachers in the collaborative group had advance knowledge of the items included in the annual jurisdiction tests. This was secure information, which they could not share with their school colleagues. They also gained a complex and thorough understanding of assessment design and construction. This information was more than that conveyed to teachers not involved in the collaborative group through materials, teacher administration manuals and guides for scoring the assessments supplied to classroom teachers who administered the assessments. Due to their work on the committee, they also had a confident knowledge of strategies for classroom use of performance assessment terms, strategies for use of the scoring rubrics in regular classroom assignments, procedures for administering the assessments, and background to the reasons for those procedures. Since they were encouraged to share any information that was not confidential with their school staff, and to act as ambassadors of the project in their school, they were viewed by

staff outside of the project as having an enhanced and in depth understanding of the performance assessment project.

Confidence

The knowledge and understanding of a major jurisdictional initiative allowed the teachers involved in the collaborative group to develop confidence and expertise they may not have gained in their schools. While the expectation that they deliver inservice sessions to their colleagues created some trepidation for those not familiar with speaking to larger groups of adults, it also created confidence. Nancy shared that she experienced

> a lot of increased confidence. We know our stuff! That makes me feel good. One [inservice participant] said, "I really enjoyed your presentation", and I mean that person is a principal and has been in this game for 20-30 years and *knows!* I think that for me I actually felt I had something to contribute rather than just sitting back and learning.

Understanding of the Jurisdiction

For participants the increased understanding they developed about the jurisdiction and its work allowed them to appreciate and understand how their school fit into the school district. For some, like Ruth, this was a major revelation, as she was not fully aware of the role and work carried out at the central administrative office when she began work on the collaborative group. She explained that personally

> it's been good for me to go and get to know [group leaders] better and look at how the division operates on a more personal basis instead of you're [central office staff] over here and we're [school based staff] over there. From our point of view [school] we don't care what your [central office] agenda is. We are just worried about our world. When you go there you see the big picture.

Differences In Experiences For Experienced Teachers And Inexperienced Teachers

The interviews probed for differences in the experiences reported by each participant and one of the research questions was specifically directed at differences that

were reported by teachers defined as experienced (Ruth and Larry) and inexperienced (Nancy and Debra) by definitions stated in Chapter 1. This section reports the findings relative to the years of teaching experience of the participants.

Personal Preferences and Individual Needs

The experiences participants in the collaborative group found valuable were similar for the experienced and inexperienced teachers interviewed. Interview transcripts for all participants reveal threads of all experiences described in the preceding section. The differences for experienced participants compared to inexperienced occurred in the importance attached to particular experiences and the degree to which a particular experience was personally valuable. In other words, personal preferences and individual needs seemed to separate the importance of particular experiences for participants and not the amount of teaching experience accrued. To use curricular knowledge as an example, both Larry and Ruth found the opportunity to increase their curricular knowledge valuable because they were teaching grades or subjects that they had had no prior experience with and thus their knowledge of curriculum at those particular grade levels was low, even though they were considered experienced teachers for the purpose of this study. In comparison, Debra, while admitting that the curricular knowledge gained was valuable, found other experiences such as the opportunity to talk and discuss issues outside of her school to be of more value to her personally. Though she was considered an inexperienced teacher in this study, she has been teaching the same grade for several years, and is comfortable with her level of expertise with curricular knowledge.

Career Cycle

When participants were asked if there was a time in a teacher's career cycle when experiences such as those provided by the collaborative project group would be on most assistance, opinions varied. Ruth believed that a collaborative group experience would be of value to teachers new to the profession as well as teachers in new situations, such as her own case as experienced in teaching, but new to a subject. Debra felt that for a teacher new to a classroom, a collaborative group experience might be overwhelming. She explained:

> [For] the beginning teacher, something like this would not be very good for them. Especially up here, where things are so hard. I think for them to figure out all the things they have to do [in the classroom] and this, would be too much.

There was some support for involvement in a collaborative project group as a boost for sagging morale or an inspiring pick-me-up for a teacher who might need a new challenge in the mid stages of a career. Teachers believed that the experiences provided by the collaborative group would be stimulating to a teacher who had solid knowledge and experience, but needed a change of direction or a challenging new project.

Size and Gender

Opinions of the participants varied for the influence of gender and the size of the group on collaborative interactions. Some participants believed that groups of mixed gender were important. When asked why they believed this, it was more a matter of personal preference than that the group connected better or was more creative or efficient. Size of the groups did have an effect on interaction. In the grade 7 two-member groups, if one member was absent, which did occur on one occasion, the other member was left to conduct the work of the group alone. There was little collaboration occurring at this

meeting! Groups of three were the preferred arrangement, as they were small enough to allow teachers to get to know each other, but provided opportunities for all to take part.

Factors Necessary For Successful Collaboration

Eight factors were identified by participants as necessary for their participation in the collaborative group project. They included the (a) support of their school administrator, (b) some support from their school staff, (c) a belief in the work of the committee, (d) congenial working groups, (e) autonomy in decision making regarding content of the materials developed, (f) amenable travel and accommodation arrangements, (g) knowledge that students left behind were in good hands, and (h) time to socialize with other groups and group members. In the following section each factor is discussed.

School Administrator Support

All interview participants felt that their work on the committee was supported and valued by their school principal. Teachers spoke of the support of their school administrator in facilitating their participation in the collaborative project group. School principals are aware of the work of the committee and know how the process of committee work and creation of materials stimulates activities in their school because the assessment materials that the committee produces are used in all schools in the jurisdiction. Since the materials and the work of the committee enjoy a high profile within the jurisdiction, school administrators could feel compelled to nominally support members of their staff in seeking committee work unless their presence on the committee would cause hardship at the school. From the thoughts and observations of the

participants it seems clear that administrators provided clear enthusiastic support both initially when members were sought for the committee and throughout the school year. Ruth related how her principal made arrangements so she could participate.

> My principal rearranged the whole schedule so I could come. It was very important to the principal that I come and he made it easy for me to take part.

One teacher felt that it was through her work on the committee that the value of the work of previous years' committees was appreciated and put into action at her school. During the two previous years, her school had not had representation on the collaborative group committee. Although representation had been sought, the school principal was new to the school and engaged in intensive relationship building within the staff and in the community. The school and staff were very insulated from other schools and the happenings in the jurisdiction. Because the school was contacted to administer some pilot tests, the teacher on the committee learned about the materials being created and became interested in the work of the committee. When the teacher approached the school principal about becoming a member during the year that this study was conducted, the principal acquiesced and by mid-year actively supported her work within the school to the extent that she conducted a half-day inservice with staff. As Debra explained:

> Then the principal said, "What do you think; should we have an inservice?" [the principal] now sees performance assessment as threading through the whole school and not just another test. So I think [the principal's] mind is changed and the support and encouragement is great.

Larry reported that he would not have participated without the direct encouragement of his administrator. Being new to the school and the jurisdiction, Larry knew nothing about performance assessment or the work ongoing in the jurisdiction with its use and development in NSD. Other staff at his school indicated that he should be the

school representative on the committee because of his grade level teaching assignment. As the newest member of staff he was reluctant to push himself as the school's representative, but his principal actively supported and encouraged him to take part.

While all participants acknowledged administrative support as necessary for their initial interest and continued success with the committee, no one mentioned that the school administrator could be the catalyst in formation of a similar group at their own school.

Supportive School Staff

In addition to support from their school principal, participants acknowledged that there had to be some acceptance of their work on the committee from other professional staff at their schools. While the degree of staff awareness varied, participants needed to feel that their school staff was at worst, neutral and at best whole-heartedly embracing the kind of assessment and instructional practice advocated by the committee.

Larry was initially surprised when staff at his school informed him "he was expected to do performance assessment." All staff spoke highly of the materials produced by the committee in previous years and were interested in his reports about the meetings at staff meetings at the school. He was pleased with the familiarity of the his staff with the philosophy and process and felt supported by them.

Nancy's experience was different. Coming from the largest staff of any of the interview participants, her absence from school to attend collaborative group meetings was not as immediately noticeable as it was on staffs with fewer teachers. That is not to say that a spot on the committee was not highly sought after by staff at her school. As explained earlier, the committee organizers attempted to minimize impact on an

individual school by limiting the representation on the committee to one teacher per school. Several other teachers had expressed interest in sitting on the committee. Nancy was selected because of her interest, her previous support of performance assessment, and her grade level assignment. Her principal provided an opportunity at each staff meeting for her to discuss aspects of the performance assessment process that were timely and she took full advantage of the opportunity provided. She provided updates on progress of piloting, instructional strategies she used in her classroom, and samples of charts and graphic organizers she prepared for her students. She incorporated several of these topics into an inservice session for her colleagues. She was always willing to talk with staff and provide them with any materials she had that might help them. While not all staff members took advantage of her offers, sufficient numbers did to provide her with a strong sense that her work and participation on the collaborative group committee was valued by her workmates. Nancy admitted that had she not enjoyed some form of support, her continued presence on the committee would have been difficult.

Debra, like Nancy, attempted to provide as much information and assistance as she could to her staff about the work of the committee and materials and instructional suggestions to assist teachers. She, too, hosted an in-service session for her staff, and interest picked up on the part of most of the professional staff after that. While she felt her staff was supportive of her presence in the collaborative group, she did not feel that they were enthusiastic in their support. She did acknowledge that the degree of support provided was sufficient to keep her attending.

There were staff members at Ruth's school who were openly critical of the mandate and work of the performance assessment collaborative group. Ruth herself, while

interested in the committee and its work, was hesitant in her support initially. Motivated strongly to "always do what is best for the kids," Ruth attended initially because of a strong desire to see for herself what the purpose and work of the committee was about. She had decided to reserve judgment until she could see for herself. Prior to attending any collaborative group meetings, she had listened to the opinions expressed by the critical staff member, but chose to wait and see and form her own judgment.

After attending the first meeting, she felt there was merit in the work of the committee and "good stuff for kids" in the materials she and her collaborative group members were developing. She went back to her school, and discussed with individual staff members the work and progress of the committee. She did not provide more than brief updates at staff meetings and preferred to speak individually with colleagues about the purpose and use of the materials she was helping to develop. With the openly critical staff member, she did not hesitate to offer her reasons for her belief in the work of the collaborative group, but she did not attempt to force her point of view unless asked. She felt supported in her work by her staff, and believed by the end of the school year, the staff member who had been critical initially supported her, as well.

Agreeable Arrangements for Students

Knowing that their students were in capable hands at the school was a critical factor for some members' continued participation. For Ruth, it was crucial that instruction in her classes continue while she was absent at meetings. She was adamant. "I wouldn't come without a certified substitute and my principal arranged for that."

Similarly, on two occasions collaborative group members missed meetings because acceptable arrangements for substitutes could not be made locally. If participants

believed they were causing undue hardship to students and other staff, they chose to skip an individual meeting.

Belief in the Work of the Committee

Closely related to staff support was personal acceptance and interest in performance assessment, coupled with a personal belief that what they were doing was important for their own students and others in the jurisdiction. While there are certainly pragmatic reasons (Young, 1993) that individuals may have for agreeing to work on a collaborative group committee such as this, the nature and intensity of the work on this particular committee required a strong interest in assessment. Ruth asserted, "I was not a supporter, as you know. I heard conflicting things about the work of the group from other teachers in the school. She went on to explain that she became a believer in the work the committee was accomplishing and it supported her personal philosophy that "I'll do whatever helps kids." Teachers were willing and eager to commit to the committee process. Most took work home to complete between meetings. Interview transcripts indicate that conversations on the planes to and from meetings often centred on the work they had just completed or were going to begin.

Teachers became vocal advocates for their school jurisdiction in their local communities. One local newspaper printed an article that portrayed NSD in a negative light and Nancy took issue with it. She spoke of writing a response to the article that defended the points she had taken issue with, and to emphasize that

> "I work on performance based, and it is cutting edge, and we do not lower our standards."

Autonomy in Task Development and Design

Teachers reported a feeling of ownership and control of the development process. The Program of Studies (2000) was the only parameter that bound the creation of performance task items. Organizers frequently told teachers that it was their work, and that they were the experts in terms of what students at their particular grade levels would respond to.

The development process required that grade level groups begin at their first meeting with the construction of four performance tasks in math that would appear on the jurisdictionally administered tests later in the school year. They also had to select books that they felt would interest and engage their students for inclusion in the reading tasks. During the course of the four meetings, the process included piloting the constructed tasks with students, editing, refining, and sometimes completely rewriting a particular task. Other than formatting and final editing for print, decision-making was left in the hands of the committee members.

Collaborative group members reported feeling initially overwhelmed by this responsibility. As Larry related, " It's a lot of work and causing some stress for some of us because there is so much to know!" As the process unfolded, they embraced the work as their own, and eloquently defended decisions and changes they had made to the materials to the project organizers. The way they defended and presented the material in the inservices showed their sense of ownership. It was their work and they believed in it. Similarly, they were able to accept suggestions from project organizers when changes were discussed that organizers believed should be made to reflect curricular intent or rigour of the particular task.

Congenial Grade Level Working Groups

Teachers interviewed found that the congeniality of the grade level groups was a factor that was necessary for their participation. Interview data contain frequent references to the cohesiveness and cooperativeness of the grade level working groups. Teachers enjoyed working with each other and while they were not always in agreement with each other, they found ways to negotiate and come to consensus.

One way that groups worked this out was through the conscious and unconscious adoption of roles. Grade level group members adopted specific roles in their groups over the course of the four meetings. Larry described the roles that formed in his group:

> People have recognized where their strengths are and have started to realign. Some people did certain things and that's a strength they have. We have a recorder and an organizer and I'm kind of the design team.

By the last interview Larry acknowledged that while they had "kind of fallen into their roles" in his group, he believed his small group to be

> not insecure about criticizing…not negative criticism but bringing up questions about how things are worded or written or how our rubric is…we're just more comfortable with each other.

Travel and Accommodation

Due to the geographic size of the jurisdiction, and to reduce time away from regular classes and cost of individual travel expenses, most collaborative group members were required to fly in small, single engine charter airplanes to attend meetings. For many group members this was the first time they had flown in aircraft of this size. Weather conditions can vary greatly and have significant effect on the comfort and security of passengers. Project organizers addressed all concerns promptly and responded to individual requests as much as possible. If a particular committee member was violently

opposed to flying, and driving could be arranged, the project organizers accommodated individual preferences.

Collaborative group participants were provided with single occupancy hotel accommodations for the duration of each of the meetings. All travel and meal expenses were covered by NSD. Evaluation sheets completed at each meeting indicate participants were pleased with the arrangements and believed their individual requests were considered.

Opportunities to Socialize

Participants enjoyed the occasions the group organizers provided for after hours social activities. This became apparent after the initial focus group meeting that I convened. Participants viewed the focus group wine and cheese evening not as an opportunity planned by me to gather data, but a pleasant evening to allow collaborative group members to become acquainted!

Interview participants mentioned the focus group meeting several times and asked during the interviews for similar events to be arranged. One group dinner was arranged during the third collaborative group meeting.

As the meetings progressed, collaborative group members began to informally organize themselves. They began to go for evening meals as a group, plan shopping excursions, and meet for movies or sports events.

Summary

Table 5.3 lists the experiences created by work in the collaborative group that participants identified as being valuable to them. They have been listed under three categories, experiences of professional value, experiences of professional and personal

value, and experiences of personal value and are discussed under these headings. Eight factors were identified as necessary and helpful to the successful and continued participation and in the collaborative project group. They have been separated into three categories, professional, professional and personal, and personal. They are summarized in Table 5.4.

While these distinctions are somewhat arbitrary, and it could be argued that all experiences have some value professionally and personally to participants, I believe it is useful to separate them in the same way as participants did.

Table 5.3 Experiences Valued by Participants in the Collaborative Group

	VALUABLE COLLABORATIVE GROUP EXPERIENCES
Professional	Familiar Experiences Increased curricular knowledge Sense of professionalism
Professional and Personal	New learning Freedom to talk Time to talk
Personal	Increased confidence Deeper understanding of the jurisdiction Knowledge not held by others

Table 5.4 Factors Identified as Necessary for Participation

Professional Factors	Support of school administrator Support from school staff Assurance that students were well taken care of
Professional and Personal Factors	Belief in the work of the committee Autonomy in decisions of the group
Personal Factors	Congenial working groups Agreeable travel and accommodation arrangements Time to socialize

The following chapter discusses the changes in practice interview participants described and the changes they reported in their beliefs about teaching. It also presents the findings from the two administrations of the TES.

CHAPTER 6

CHANGES IN PRACTICE

Over the duration of the four collaborative group meetings, intensive discussion occurred concerning student progress, instructional practice, and daily activities in teachers' classrooms. As the purpose of this study concerned how beliefs about teaching change over the course of teachers' involvement in a collaborative group project, this chapter presents findings in relation to the following questions:

1. What changes do teachers report in their classroom practice because of their collaborative group experience?
2. How do teacher efficacy beliefs change with participation in a collaborative group project?
3. What changes occurred in efficacy beliefs as measured by the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES)?

The findings are organized around the two issues of reported changes in practice and reported changes in beliefs. Changes teachers related in their classroom practices and beliefs are described and supported by comments made by the participants during the in-depth interviews. The changes recorded in the two administrations of the TES are reported and the two groups of teachers surveyed are described.

The TES was administered to all teachers new to NSD in October and again in May of one school year. Members of the collaborative project group were also asked to compete the survey. Results obtained from both survey administrations are reported in tabular form and are compared to results from other administrations of the TES in other studies. (Anderson et. al., 1987; Cavers, 1987; Grimmett & Crehan, 1989; and da Costa,

1991, 1992). The chapter closes with a summary of the changes in practice and beliefs reported by teachers.

Changes in Practice

Teachers identified seven areas where they believed changes in their teaching practices had occurred due to discussions and their involvement in the collaborative group. The seven areas were (a) increased knowledge and understanding of curriculum, (b) better application of pedagogical principles, (c) increased use of proven strategies, (d) use of focused language, (e) modeling success, (f) raised expectations for student success, and (g) increased sense of responsibility for student learning. Each of these areas is discussed, with support from interview excerpts.

Increased Knowledge And Understanding Of Curricula

Each interview probed for changes in classroom strategies instituted since the previous meeting of the group. Increased curricular knowledge, particularly for elementary teachers, appeared repeatedly in the interviews conducted. It is not surprising that teachers felt their curricular knowledge increased as a result of their work with the collaborative project group. The nature of their work demanded frequent reference to specific outcomes of the Alberta Elementary and Junior High School Programs of Study (2000). Much of the discussion in grade level groups concerned interpretation and application of the curricular documents. Nancy described how she had grown as a teacher as a result of her work with the collaborative project group. She explained how conversations in the group helped her to come to a better understanding of curriculum. Nancy recalled:

> I find the language arts program overwhelming. There are over 150 outcomes you have to meet and some of them are pretty vague. For example, "Will listen attentively" or "Read and write at grade level ". So one [group member] showed me how to group some outcomes and how to simplify and understand things better. I've never thought about curriculum that way before. You just have to have someone point it out.

At the elementary level, three of four core curricular areas have experienced major revision since 1993 (see Elementary Program of Study, 2000). Since elementary teachers are most usually subject generalists, internalizing and interpreting those changes can be a large undertaking. Larry found this to be true when he changed grade level assignments and began teaching in a different province. He explained:

> Being new to my grade and coming from [different province] getting used to a new curriculum is a huge undertaking. In doing this project, it's really helped me to get to know my language arts and math.

While teachers in the junior high school group reported better understanding of the program, increased curricular knowledge was not as striking as with the elementary group. While interview data did not directly reflect this finding, notes from informal conversations in both the Grade 7 grade level groups revealed that group members focused more on strategies than on assisting each other to a deeper understanding of curricular statements or application. Ruth explained that part of her purpose in joining the collaborative group was to

> learn as much as I could from whoever was there…if they [other group members] have expertise, I want it.

Better Application of Pedagogical Principles

Linked to increased curricular knowledge was the understanding and application of what one participant described as "how things should be." Discussions in the

collaborative grouped enabled participants to recall theory and practice learned in their teacher training that they had forgotten, or allowed to fall into disuse. Debra stated:

> It's really important for me to be reminded of the things I learned in university. There it didn't mean much because I hadn't taught yet, but it helped to be reminded that I do know what I should do.

As they described their classrooms and the activities they were currently engaged in, participants reflected and debated about why they were committed to a particular activity, or what was the purpose in a certain assignment. They listened to others tell of activities they found effective and ways that they had found successful in teaching a particular concept. As they thought about the discussions and considered the conversations in relation to their own classrooms, changes occurred. Nancy provided this example of her realization that all activities, even if they are suggested in teacher manuals, need to have a clear purpose.

> If you know what you are doing, you don't need these fillers. When I look back, I realize I wasted time. I thought I was doing something great, but I wasn't hitting the target, the Program of Studies and now it's: forget this nice, cute worksheet for Easter. It's nice and it's cute, but it *has* to tie in, it has to have a specific purpose.

Proven Strategies

Teachers' manuals or program guides often provide excellent strategies to reinforce or teach a new concept to students. Sometimes those techniques work well; other times they are not effective with a particular group of students. When teachers have several lessons fail to convey the concept they wanted to teach, or when students find the activity too easy or too difficult, the desire to continue to attempt new activities or unfamiliar techniques wanes. The tendency is to continue to teach in a manner that is proven and

effective, and to stop attempting activities and strategies that are untried. Debra discussed how she grappled with mathematics instruction in her class.

> I found I was relying on the same old questions because I knew they worked. I needed some guidelines, so the rubrics really helped me see what kind of questions I could ask in math, and what kind of answers I could expect.

Conversations in the collaborative group regarding activities that were successful for others encouraged teachers to return to their classrooms and try new strategies again or to approach in a different way a technique that had had little success previously. Participants reported they felt more encouraged to try techniques that were different for them when other members of their group reported success with the activity. Larry explained:

> Next year I'm going to start my Math differently; try the things that work for the people who have more experience.

Focused Language

Participants reported they felt frustrated and lacking in their efforts to adjust instruction to the language needs and levels of their predominantly ESL students. Discussions in the collaborative group with other members who had more or longer experience working with ESL students were helpful and provided direction for teachers to try more focused direct language in their teaching. All participants mentioned how they had changed their way of teaching to include more specific, focused language. Interview data indicate that the use of more directed focused language was typical of all participants. In Ruth's class, this meant making sure that her use of language in her classroom was the model she wanted her students to use and that her directions carried precisely the message she wanted to convey. She described how she has changed her use of language:

> Last year I would have explained how to do a specific assignment. This year I explain, but I also model language I want them to use in their answers, and I repeat it several times in my explanation. I would say I model language more deliberately.

Nancy mentioned her focus on language was to make sure her instructions were clear and organized in a manner that students could understand. Nancy recalled how the discussions with the collaborative group encouraged her to institute change in her method of delivery. She explained:

> The way [discussions about language] changed my teaching was that I really get in there and make sure I make it clear for kids in an organized, structured way that this is what we are going to learn and this is how it is going to happen.

Debra remembered a unit she had recently modified from the previous school year. She recounted:

> We read a lot of books. The most different thing I've done is started on very purposeful planning and use of language: the words I want them to use. I had them [her students] write poems, stories, and plays. I had them **USE** the new language in very different ways for them.

As Debra reflected on her use of language with her students, discussions in the group helped her to realize that she needed to be deliberate with language for her students in order for them to use similar words and structures in their own work.

Modeling Success

Teachers described how they gained a greater understanding of the importance of good teaching strategies, particularly modeling successful performances or assignments. Although several participants had ESL training, most were unfamiliar with students whose first language was not English, or children whose language development lagged behind usual expectations. They spoke of needing to alter strategies to accommodate students, and attempting to alter their teaching, but feeling unsure that the modifications were right for their students. Discussions with other teachers in the collaborative group

helped clarify processes and strategies they perhaps were applying, but did not understand. Larry's experience and his understanding of how his practice had changed were typical of changes related by others in the group. He described:

> My practices haven't changed a lot but now I know why I'm doing them and I am more aware of being deliberate in my instructions. I show kids what I want for an assignment. We talked about rubrics, about how they are always a secret. Now I share the rubric and I show the kids if they want a good mark, here's what their work needs to look like and here's what they need to do to get it. I used to think it was giving the answers if I showed what I was looking for. Now I see it's not giving it away…it's my job to teach the things they need to get to where I want them to go.

Ruth employed modeling in a different way than other participants. She utilized students who had graduated and moved on to high school to help model success for her students. She realized that although she and her colleagues at her school told students what high school expectations and demands would be, students were not internalizing the information. She encouraged several of the previous year's students to come back and talk to her class about the demands of high school. She explained:

> These kids will come to the school and say to our Grade 9's, "You have no idea what its like when you leave here. These are the things I'm having trouble with. When she [teacher] says they don't care in grade 10 like they do here, she's right."

Debra extended her increasing understanding of rubrics by sharing them with her students. She shared:

> I'm using a lot of rubrics and they [rubrics] …show me the quality of the children's work as well as the degree of what my expectations are…it's a two-way street. And I found it was really good because when the child who got a B came to me to ask why, I could *show* using the rubric instead of telling.

Thus for Debra, the power of modelling success to her students was a crucial change that she noted in her teaching practice, motivated by conversations with her collaborative group members.

Increased student expectations

Teachers reported considerable change in their practice as a result of participation in the collaborative project group in the area of their expectations for student outcomes. Teachers base their expectations of students on their perceptions of (a) what is expected in curriculum and (b) what students can handle intellectually. In remote schools, serving culturally diverse groups, expectations may be rooted in stereotypes of student ability or students' past performance. One teacher pointed out:

> I think I've just raised my expectations all around. I do think if we are honest teachers and we're white we do have a hint in the back of our minds where, [we say] it's okay; they're just native kids. And I know with some of those kids; I've done the best I can. But now I think, if I had pushed harder, they probably would have done better. And I'm wondering if there are more like me. We have to remember they are kids. It doesn't matter what colour. Their circumstances may be different, but they are our students.

In most NSD schools, there are no similar classes to compare to. The conversations in the collaborative project group seemed to give teachers permission to expect more, even if other staff at their school were not. During one of her interviews, Ruth concluded,

> I think looking at the performance assessment tools made me realize that I could push harder.

The attitude of students to their own learning can affect what teachers expect them to achieve. Several teachers reported reluctance on the part of their students to be challenged. Although an inexperienced teacher may believe a particular assignment appropriate, students' protests over length or difficulty may cause a teacher to decrease expectations in response to student demands. Discussions held during the collaborative project group meetings gave teachers more realistic ideas of what other teachers expect and insist on with similar students. This allowed teachers to return to their classrooms

with increased certainty regarding the sorts of expectations they held for their students. These teachers also were convinced that their expectations were reasonable and that they were not asking too much of their students. Larry shared that as a result of his conversations with colleagues in the collaborative project group he was now much more confident. He concluded:

> It lets you know where your expectations should be. I'm more aware of what it [the expectation] is when I make those questions up. Teaching-wise I see a huge benefit in that I'm a lot more aware of what expectations I should have for my students.

Ruth agreed that her expectations for her students had changed and explained that she approached her students with a greater degree of assurance that her demands of them were realistic. She stated:

> It [collaborative project group] has changed my approach. I'm more demanding of them. And it's not easy, but they can do it.

Nancy also supported this point of view when she concisely declared; "I've already upped the ante for several of my students."

Increased Sense of Responsibility for Student Learning

Interview transcripts indicated that for all participants, sense of responsibility for student learning had changed over the duration of their involvement in the collaborative group. In the early sets of interviews teachers reported discouragement and frustration with the performance of students on provincial achievement tests. One of the stated goals of NSD is to increase student achievement as measured by the provincial tests, and teachers reported feeling powerless in some instances to affect any change. Nancy described her feelings after the principal had reported to staff the previous years' results.

> It was stated that our kids took a nosedive last year and it made me feel horrible; I didn't even want to see the scores. I feel pressure for my kids to do well as I do

> have the high group, but it seems like it is *only* up to me to see that they are successful and there are so many other factors… I feel pretty helpless.

Ruth described discussions held at her school concerning factors, such as attendance and attitudes towards school that affect student learning but which cannot be completely controlled by teachers. She related her own concerns about the progress of her students.

> There were lots of frustration and feelings of defeat. We [teachers at her school] felt defeated because there is so far to go and such a short time to get there. Last year I was petrified about my kids having to write achievement exams. They [the students] were at so many levels. There are the things we can't control. One kid comes for a while, drops out, and wants to start the next grade. Another has very low attendance and has to baby-sit younger siblings often. The kids seem to know education is important, but they fight us to a certain degree. They say, "this is too hard" or "I don't want to do homework."

As the year unfolded, teachers reported feeling more responsible for student learning in the areas within their control. Several described it as feeling more confident and more on track and in charge. Ruth talked about differences she had noticed from last year to this year.

> We are getting into a higher level of questioning. They [students] are resisting, but it will come once they believe in themselves, it will come.

Debra decided to attempt some strategies that she had discussed with the collaborative group, which she felt would provide successful learning experiences for her students, but were different approaches than what she had tried before. When these strategies were successful, they provided her not only with feelings of accomplishment, but a desire to provide more and better opportunities for her students. She stated that she has

> tried my ideas in my classroom and I'm getting proof that they work. That makes me want to try harder.

The main task of the collaborative project group was the creation of assessment materials and thus a significant amount of information was provided, and lengthy discussion ensued, concerning assessment practices and current theory. Teachers were encouraged to examine their current practices and contrast and compare them with the new information provided. For several teachers, this process produced a heightened sense of responsibility for fair grading practices in their classrooms and prompted a critical examination of past practice. Debra articulated the trap teachers sometimes fall into when they base grades too much on their perceptions of what students can achieve rather than on work samples and what students are achieving relative to provincial outcomes. As she explained:

> It's so easy to beat up on children with our high ESL population, to go intuitive with marking all the time. It seems like its easier to be emotional and intuitive because teachers know the parents or home situation…instead of focusing on what the child has done and can do and documenting actual work instead of a perception of what kids are capable of.

Debra's recognition that grading decisions are sometimes made by intuition and not documented evidence caused her to critically examine her own grading practices and promoted in her a greater sense of responsibility for the students that she taught.

Changes In Beliefs

Teachers reported changes in the areas of (a) heightened belief in the purpose and usefulness of curricula, (b) recognition and acknowledgement of preconceptions and stereotypes concerning Aboriginal children, and (c) a developing awareness or disruption of their sense of complacency. In the following section, each of the three areas is discussed using examples drawn from the interview transcripts.

Belief In Curricula

Although teachers shared numerous examples of how their understanding of curriculum had increased through participation in the collaborative group process, it was apparent though their comments that their belief in the program of studies and the abilities of their students to challenge it had strengthened as well. In the collaborative project group, during the first one or two meetings, teachers' discussions during their working sessions about the curriculum revealed some doubt on the part of some group members as to its relevance for their students. None of the participants spoke openly against the curricular documents; they emphasized their enhanced understanding through the use of it in their work in the collaborative group. However there was an undercurrent of doubt as to whether the provincial program was suitable for their students. In the interviews conducted after two or three meetings, the doubts teachers may have had became assuaged by their increasing understanding of the tenets of the curricular documents and their growing belief that this program could work for all students. Ruth explained that she now has

> a clearer vision of what I want to do next year. Before I was following more the guidebook than the curriculum, where now I see the big picture better and I can see where I need to cut and where I need to embellish. I have a clearer focus.

Accompanying this growing conviction that the curriculum was appropriate for their students was the understanding that the curriculum was a multi-faceted document, which set the boundaries, but depended on teacher expertise to decide delivery options and areas of emphasis for particular groups of students. Debra described her newly confirmed belief that the curriculum was working for her students.

> It has helped me to focus on my pedagogy and helped me realize there are some things that are quite superfluous in the classroom. I guess that's why we have curriculum! To set some parameters and now I see they are good parameters.

As teachers began to understand the relationship between their growing awareness of the meaning and purpose of curriculum, and its application through pedagogical techniques to their students, their own beliefs in their own notions of what students required strengthened. They were more accepting of acknowledging their own misunderstandings and more willing to trust their own judgments regarding teaching for the future. Larry stated that he now understood

> the curriculum in depth. I realize I was teaching above the kids and when I looked, my grade is not expected to do what I was trying to teach. That was a useful insight for me. I realize I am the one who needs to drive this process.

For Debra, her increasing belief in her abilities to apply curriculum had to do with her understanding of herself as a risk taker. For her, the support of the collaborative group allowed her to acknowledge the error potential in taking chances, and realize that she had to keep trying. Debra related this to her planning process. She explained:

> With my planning, I have changed my notion of risk taking too. I always thought I was a risk taker… but sometimes if you take a risk, you make a mistake and if you don't have support, you stop taking risks. The collaborative group gives that support.

Preconceptions Regarding Aboriginal Children

Participants were able to acknowledge the beliefs they held regarding Aboriginal children and their educational potential. While none of the questioning during the interviews was directed specifically toward beliefs or stereotypes concerning the abilities or characteristics of Aboriginal children educationally, teachers were aware of notions held by other staff in their schools, by neighbouring communities, and by themselves and discussed them as they explained other issues. In some instances, the acknowledgement

of these beliefs and how they were changing or developing were revealed by their descriptions of how they were trying to help school make sense for their students, or how they themselves were attempting to understand the interactions in their classroom. Many of the teachers' revelations concerned how preconceptions influence expectations for student success. Ruth explained it this way:

> My perception is, I'm afraid of Chinese people because I think they are so very bright. So, if I was teaching a Chinese kid, I would expect nothing but the very best. It's a preconceived notion, right? The Aboriginal child…they struggle because they have all this baggage that they pack. So if this work is mediocre, so that's all right. **BUT** it isn't!

Teachers acknowledged that a prevailing perception in schools was to not challenge Aboriginal children intellectually in classrooms. Debra described her changing beliefs in regards to her conviction in her classroom to always do things that have purpose.

> It's easy in the classroom with our populations of children to think that we have to give the children the easy work, and it reminds me to always do purposeful things.

Other teachers talked about observations they had made regarding their students that had heightened their sense of the differences in learning styles for some Aboriginal students, particularly those who are ESL. Ruth described her observation of how her ESL students switch between two languages and her developing awareness that wait time for a student response may be longer than what it is for unilingual English speaking students. She remembered one boy.

> I think he hears it in English, translates it into Cree, then translates the response back to English and says it. It takes him a long time to respond.

She realized her understanding of what she needed to do to assist him in her class had changed, but was poignantly aware that every time that student encountered a new

teacher, he or she would need to come to the same understanding, and make similar adjustments to those Ruth had, if the student was to continue to be successful. Ruth was pessimistic that this would always occur. She continued:

> I worry about him in high school. They already think our kids can't cut it. I'm afraid they won't give him the chance to try.

Teachers recognized that complacency on the part of teachers was evident in their schools. Their discussions in the collaborative group and the expectations teachers in other schools held for their students enabled teachers to acknowledge and challenge their own sense of complacency and recognize its existence in their own school. Ruth's observation was typical of comments made by other teachers. She elaborated:

> It goes back to what we talked about, complacency with Aboriginal kids. I've realized I can push harder. It's okay to expect more and I don't have to coddle them. And to be able to push more...Last year, I would have let that slide; they're not at that level. But they can be at that level if we show them how to be.

Disruption In Complacency

Teachers recognized that their complacency had been disrupted. They realized that in some instances they had been willing to accept the status quo and not challenge accepted beliefs. When they came to the understanding that their expectations for students were changing, it was an unsettling, but exciting revelation for them. Nancy's recognition of her growing understanding of the role of the collaborative project in shaking her complacency eloquently captured the understanding that other participants shared. Nancy stated:

> I think that's what this project is about, helping people get over the hurdle of complacency; the "well I can't do anything about it so I'm going to stop trying" attitude. There are things we can do.

Others realized that expectations are the key to dispelling the shreds of complacency and acceptance of less than acceptable work. Ruth became excited as she discussed her beliefs about complacency and how expectations and a belief that students can do well can galvanize action. She explained her feeling that

> complacency is a very unhealthy thing and I am sensing that, teachers sometimes get complacent and just say, "Oh well, we won't do well, so what". And I think we have to say, "but we *can* if we *do* these things." Whatever these things are, we will have to determine.

The work and discussions of the collaborative group allowed teachers to express their thoughts about students' abilities, teachers' own expectations, teachers' actions and understanding of teaching, in a supported and trusting environment. The conversations with other group members allowed teachers to express doubts and concerns and ask questions of others and of themselves. They were able to challenge and question their own complacencies and experience changes in belief and understanding for themselves. Nancy described her increasing awareness of how her involvement in the collaborative group clarified her thinking. She stated:

> Before I was involved in this project it was like shooting in the dark, you want your kids to get as high a mark on exams as they possibly can, but how do you get there? And you wonder…am I expecting too much? Do the kids have the ability? Now I know. I'm not, they can, and I need to aim high.

Teachers admitted that disrupting complacency was not always comfortable, but that it was a welcome and necessary change if they were to be successful as educators and their students were to succeed. It is not easy to examine practices and beliefs and conclude that they may have fallen short of what they should be. As Larry discussed the changes he observed in himself, he concluded

> it isn't easy to admit, but expectations are the key change for me, setting new expectations for myself and for the kids.

Interview transcripts, discussions in the collaborative group during the group meetings, and observations made during the interviews and meetings revealed the changes in beliefs noted in the preceding paragraphs. The purpose in administering the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES) was to demonstrate any changes in beliefs in the area of personal teaching efficacy. The next section presents findings in relation to the two administrations of the TES and the indications of changes in beliefs found.

Teacher Efficacy Scale

The nine items used by Gibson and Dembo (1984) to constitute personal teaching efficacy were administered to all teachers new to the jurisdiction and to all members of the collaborative group in early October and then again in May of the school year in which this study took place. The return rate was 67% for the collaborative group and 48% for the group of new teachers. Table 6.2 reports the scores for both October and May administrations of the TES to the teachers comprising the collaborative project group and the group of teachers new to NSD in the year in which this study occurred.

Table 6.1 Comparison of TES scores of the collaborative group to new NSD teachers

	OCTOBER	MAY	Change October to May
Collaborative group n=12	**3.93**	**3.96**	**+0.03**
New teachers n=24 October n=25 May	**3.50**	**3.73**	**+0.23**
Difference in two groups	**.43**	**.23**	**.2**

The TES survey responses indicate that both groups, the new teachers to the jurisdiction and the teachers in the collaborative group experienced a change in their beliefs relative to personal teaching efficacy over the course of the school year, with the greater increase occurring in teachers new to the jurisdiction who did not participate in

the collaborative group. Compared to the group of new teachers to the jurisdiction, TES scores of the teachers participating in the collaborative group were higher and remained higher than those of the teachers new to the jurisdiction and not involved in the collaborative group. Neither group demonstrated scores similar to those reported by Anderson et al. (1987), Cavers (1987), Grimmett and Crehan (1989), and da Costa (1991, 1992), in which the average of the mean scores for all of the above authors was 4.58.

The collaborative project group was comprised of experienced and inexperienced teachers as defined earlier in this study. There was little difference in the TES scores for experienced and inexperienced teachers in the October administration. Inexperienced teachers demonstrated higher scores in the May administration and experienced teachers had lower scores in May than in October. Table 6.2 compares the TES scores of the collaborative project group by contrasting the scores of each group.

Table 6.2 Comparison of the TES scores of the experienced teachers to the inexperienced teachers within the collaborative group (n=12)

	OCTOBER	MAY	CHANGE
Experienced Teachers (n=8)	3.90	3.86	- 0.04
Inexperienced Teachers (n=4)	3.97	4.17	+ 0.2
Difference	.07	0.31	

Within the collaborative project group, there were teachers new to the group in the year in which the study occurred, and there were some teachers who returned to the group from previous years. Teachers new to the group scored higher in October and in May than the teachers returning to the group. Teachers returning to the group demonstrated lower scores in May than in October. Table 6.3 reports the scores of teachers new to the group and returning teachers to the collaborative project group.

Table 6.3 Comparison of the TES scores of teachers new to the group to the teachers returning to the group from the previous year. (n=12)

	OCTOBER	MAY	CHANGE
New to the group (n=10)	3.93	4.02	+0.09
Returning to the group (n=2)	3.89	3.69	- 0.20
Difference	.04	0.33	

It could be concluded that the greatest change demonstrated by any group was by the group of inexperienced teachers in the collaborative project group and by the group of teachers new to the jurisdiction but not part of the collaborative project group.

SUMMARY

Participants reported seven areas in which they believed their teaching practices had changed and identified three areas where their beliefs had undergone some change. In aligning changes in practice with changes in beliefs, I am not attempting to ascribe causality of practice to belief or the reverse. Fullan (1993b) noted, "People behave their way into new visions and ideas, not just think their way into them" (p. 13). I am not sure which changed first for the participants in this study, but changes both in practice and in beliefs did occur, perhaps in different orders for different individuals. Table 6.4 lists the changes in practice and in beliefs reported by participants in the collaborative group.

Table 6.4 Changes In Practice And Beliefs

CHANGES IN PRACTICE	CHANGES IN BELIEFS
Better understanding and knowledge of curricula	Curriculum is important
Better application of pedagogical principles Trying proven strategies Modeling success Use of focused language	
Increased expectations for students	Recognition of preconceptions about teaching native children
Increased sense of responsibility for student learning	Disruption in complacency

The results of the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES) indicate that in the group of teachers new to the jurisdiction, and the group of teachers who participated in the collaborative group over the duration of one school year, initial efficacy scores were lower than reported in several other studies. The greater change in efficacy scores was demonstrated in the group of teachers new to the jurisdiction and in the group of inexperienced teachers new to the collaborative project group in the year in which the study occurred. In the teachers who participated in the collaborative group, initial TES scores were higher and demonstrated less change in the second administration than those of the group of teachers new to the jurisdiction.

The next chapter discusses the major issue areas arising from the findings of the study. They are compared and contrasted to similar elements in the literature. As is appropriate in a qualitative study (Patton, 1990) new literature that was brought to light by the findings is presented and discussed.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

In the previous two chapters, findings relative to the purpose of this study, "How do teachers experience participation in a collaborative project group and how are their beliefs about teaching affected?" were presented. This chapter will discuss those findings in relation to both the literature explored in Chapter 2 and to other literature introduced in this chapter. Findings from the previous two chapters will be discussed relative to their agreement to or divergence from the two literature sets.

The chapter begins with a brief summary of the finding categories organized by the major groupings of (a) what experiences participants reported as valuable in the collaborative group experience; (b) what factors participants deemed necessary to support and continue their involvement in the collaborative project group; (c) what changes participants reported in their teaching practices and their beliefs about teaching; and (d) what changes occurred in the efficacy beliefs of participants and new teachers to NSD as recorded by two administrations of the TES. Changes in efficacy beliefs are discussed not only in relation to the literature, but also in terms of the interview data, observation notes, and notes of conversations and interactions within the four meetings of the collaborative project group over the course of the school year in which this study took place. The chapter concludes with a summary of the discussion and a comparison of the elements that are necessary for successful collaboration in small remote school jurisdictions such as NSD in contrast to other collaborative models.

Valuable Experiences

Nine categories emerged from the interview data as experiences that the participants considered useful during their participation in the collaborative group during the course of this study. They are: (a) familiar experiences, (b) increased curricular knowledge, (c) a sense of professionalism, (d) new learning, (e) freedom to talk, (f) time to talk, (g) increased confidence, (h) deeper understanding of the jurisdiction, and (i) acquisition of knowledge and information not held by others. Participants did not make a distinction in terms of how these experiences affected their personal or professional learning. When teachers engage in any kind of professional development activity, any new learning that ensues can rarely be ascribed to benefiting the teacher only in the professional dimension (Fessler & Christensen, 1992), as personal and professional dimensions intermingle. I have clustered the discussion of these experiences under the headings of experiences of professional value, experiences of personal and professional value, and experiences of mostly personal value.

Experiences of Professional Value

Participants identified three categories of experiences provided by the collaborative group that had mostly professional value to them in the performance of their teaching duties. They were: (a) familiar experiences, (b) increased curricular knowledge, and (c) a sense of professionalism.

Familiar Experiences

The opportunity provided by the collaborative group to engage in a lengthy relationship with teachers who shared common experiences and situations was particularly appreciated by teachers. They viewed their experiences in northern rural and

remote schools as unique, and not at all similar to the experiences of teaching colleagues in other schools in the province. There were frequent references in the interview transcripts to phrases such as, "up here" or "here" contrasted with urban areas. Participants believed their teaching colleagues in larger or less remote schools would not understand their teaching experiences and interactions with students.

The communities and schools in which the interview participants lived and worked were very different from the birthplaces and the homes of the participants (see Chapter 4 for a description of the communities and schools, and participant profiles). For all participants, except Larry, it was their first experience as a cultural minority. Larry had spent 10 years on a federal First Nations Reserve and had family relationships in the Metis community. The sense of identification provided by the discussion of similar circumstances, supports Bandura's (1977) assertion that the more closely an observer identifies with the model, the stronger the impact of the experience. By comparing their thoughts and ideas to the thoughts and ideas of their collaborative group members, participants were able to confirm for themselves that their perceptions were right and that they were drawing the same conclusions from their observations and experiences in their community and in their school. When they were able to compare these same experiences, a stronger sense of identification developed, and created a sense that they were making the correct assumptions.

Bandura (1986) stated that the power of persuasion depends on the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of the persuader. Teachers involved in the collaborative group had prolonged contact with their group members, and those group members shared similar experiences. Thus, they viewed the group members as credible for their

experience in a remote northern school, and trustworthy because their experiences were similar. The importance attached to the discussion and sharing of familiar experiences by the participants suggests that contact with individuals with similar, familiar experiences was powerful for the collaborative group members in confirming and sustaining their belief in themselves as successful in the classroom.

Talking to their colleagues at their own school only partially satisfied participants' need to find similar experiences as, other than Nancy, all participants were the sole teacher of their grade or subject in the school. They could talk, and did talk, to teachers in their school about their difficulties and their successes, but it was not the same as being able to exchange ideas with a teacher who taught the same grade and subject content as they did. The grade level expertise made the difference for the collaborative group members and helped sustain their beliefs.

It was important for participants to be able to discuss in as great a detail as they wished all aspects of their particular teaching experience with others who shared similar situations. They seemed to find this confirming. It was as if their experiences in the remote northern schools were so removed from their previous experiential background, that they believed they were exaggerating or imagining some of the incidents and events. Being able to hear another teacher declare that he or she had a similar experience, or that that event had happened exactly in the same way, was confirming and reassuring. It was also reassuring to hear that similar resolutions to problems or teaching strategies were employed independently, so that teachers confirmed for themselves that they were making the correct professional judgments for their students. This supports Bandura's (1977) contention that vicarious experiences influence efficacy beliefs.

Knapp et al. (1995), in their discussion of teachers' constructive responses to students, state that teachers need to take "active, self-conscious steps to deal with student differences" (p.35). The work of the collaborative group emphasized using the everyday happenings that children experience in NSD schools, so teachers were culturally sensitive and aware of the significant events that could be transposed into the assessment tools they were developing. This supports the Knapp et al. (1995) argument that teachers who use more meaning oriented approaches to instruction had "a somewhat higher self-reported familiarity with students' backgrounds than teachers adopting conventional approaches" (p.154). Even though the teachers in this study had familiarity with the cultural and community backgrounds of their students, the opportunity provided by the collaborative group meetings to check and confirm with others was crucial for them.

Increased Curricular Knowledge

Hargreaves states in the forward to Huberman's (1993) text, "Teachers don't merely deliver the curriculum. They develop, define and reinterpret it too" (p.vii). Teachers in this study stated emphatically that their curricular knowledge increased, even though it is a teacher's responsibility to interpret and deliver the provincially mandated program. All teachers base instructional plans on these documents, as they are the legally prescribed materials for instruction in the province. The opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of the nuances of curricular design or outcomes is often difficult to resolve individually and appeared not to be happening as might be expected in the schools in which the participants worked. The schools in which participants taught were rural. This study did not probe as to inservice provided in curriculum areas in the small rural schools featured in this study. Young (1993) found that resource persons were not as likely to be

employed to provide curricular inservice and support in rural and in small schools of less than 200 students. Young's (1993) finding could explain why teachers in this study placed such value in their increased curricular knowledge gained during their involvement in the collaborative group. The interaction with other teachers provided an opportunity for curricular discussion and inservice that was not being met through other channels.

Participants mentioned increased curricular knowledge repeatedly. In classrooms, while teachers base long range and unit plans on curricular outcomes, often the textbook provides the actual daily work that students are asked to complete. Thus, while teachers are aware of the outcomes, they do not necessarily refer to them on a daily basis. The nature of the work of the collaborative group required a constant grounding of the assessment tasks participants were developing in the curricular documents. Added to this was the requirement to contextualize the curricular outcomes in cultural events and happenings from the daily lives of students in the communities. Thus, there was constant reference to curricular outcomes and how those outcomes translate into practical tasks. By using culture and community life as a resource for learning, teachers were able to make more explicit connections to curriculum and thus viewed it in a much less linear manner (Knapp & Associates, 1995). Not only were teachers making curricular connections for students by using students' everyday experiences, but they were also making complex curricular and social connections for themselves.

Sense of Professionalism

Teachers discussed factors that enhanced and detracted from their sense of professionalism. Teachers reported they felt professional when they engaged in the collaborative group experience. They spoke of increased feelings of professionalism away from the school; the perception in some communities that teachers are not held in the same professional standing as other professions, notably medicine and law; wavering confidence in professionalism on the part of some members of their staffs; and that persons in their communities without any affiliation to the school may not view teachers in the school as professional.

Teachers identified two issues supporting their sense of professionalism. The first of these concerns teachers' perception that when they were away from their classrooms, they had left their students with other competent teachers. In the schools in which the participants worked, certified substitute teachers are not often available. Instead, local school boards nominate individuals from the community with interest and training in working with children to supervise classes when the teacher is absent. Teachers often build agreeable working relationships with particular individuals and prefer to have them supervise their classes because they have assurance that activities will continue in a similar manner in their absence, as when they are present. The second issue, knowledge not held by others, refers to the belief held by participants that the knowledge and information gained during the collaborative group meetings was privileged in the sense that only selected individuals were aware of and subject to decisions over it. Examples of such information included discussions from the administrator's association concerning administration dates, the books to be used for the current assessments, and decisions

regarding details of administration of the assessment tasks. While these issues were raised in the findings as necessary factors and valuable experiences respectively, both issues appear to reflect on the professional nature of teachers' work and are therefore dealt with here.

It is generally accepted (Helsby, 1995) that when teachers talk of what it means to be professional they speak of two things. Teachers will mention being a professional in light of the work they do and of the actions, intent and the practices that guide it. This understanding is referred to in the literature as "professionalism" (Englund, 1996). Teachers will also talk about being a professional. "This normally has to do with how teachers feel they are seen through other people's eyes-in terms of their status, standing, regard, and levels of professional reward. Attempts to improve the status and standing of teaching are usually presented in the literature in terms of professionalization (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 152). The sense of increased or enhanced professionalism when away from the school reported by teachers may actually support the teachers' belief in the professionalization, or enhancing of their status in their own eyes. It is associated with their sense of self and sense of being valued as a person.

Participants valued the advance knowledge regarding jurisdictional events and information other teaching colleagues were not yet privy to. Much of this was confidential information about the content and nature of the performance assessments, which they could not share with staff at their schools. Because they were part of the collaborative group, they shared in the decisions regarding administration schedules and procedures for the assessments they were developing, plans for the next school year, direction of the project, and implications for impact on schools. They appreciated

knowing this and being part of decision-making before it was public in the jurisdiction. This contributed to their sense of both professionalism in that they were the holders of advanced or privileged knowledge, one of the hallmarks of a profession, and to their sense of professionalization in that they believed their status was heightened because of the knowledge they held (Hargreaves, 2000).

The expressed belief in teachers as professionals is accepted and promoted in schools (Cheng, 1996). However, the practical experiences that comprise a teachers' workday may weaken or belie this belief. Society can be ambivalent about the way it values teachers and schools (Cheers, 2001). The communities, and thus the society, in which the teachers in this study live and work is intimate and known to all. Assaults on a teacher's sense of professionalism come from many directions. As the findings in the previous chapters attest, when community perceptions of teaching as a profession are less than favourable, or when other teachers conduct themselves in a manner that is not consistent with one's own professional beliefs, the participants questioned their sense of professionalism. When members of government express beliefs and criticism about teachers' work habits and time spent on the job (Calgary Sun, February 2002), and when there is media ranking and criticism over student results (Fraser Institute, June 2002), a sense of school-based professionalism wavers.

Teachers were emphatic that their work on the collaborative group committee not harm or hinder the progress and work of their students in their classrooms. This ethic of concern for students and for their responsibilities for student learning underscores the teachers' inherent belief in themselves as professionals.

The belief that teachers in this study reported as feeling professional when they leave the school and community to work with the collaborative project group indicates that while their school based professionalism, or sense of practice may be under assault, their professionalization or sense of standing and status as a profession is enhanced by their involvement and work with the collaborative project group.

Going away from the workplace to work at an activity that is promoted as professional development, enhanced feelings of professionalism for the teachers involved in this study. Young (1989) found that a sense of professionalism is a key factor in teachers' willingness to volunteer for committee work. The environment created by the collaborative group organizers actively promoted professionalism through talk of the importance of the work the committee members were engaged in and through practice and example. Working with a group of perceived like-minded adults enhanced feelings of professionalism for the teachers in this study. Perhaps teachers , like many individuals have a stereotype that a professional works in an office. For the participants in this study, being away from the school, working in an office, and with adults contributed to enhanced feelings of professionalization as defined by Hargreaves (2000) and not professionalism as the teachers report.

The expressed beliefs by the teachers in this study about feeling professional could indicate that for them a sense of professionalism is also a sense of validation that they are engaged in improving the quality and standards of their individual practice (professionalism) but also enhancing the status and standing of teachers generally (professionalization). This sense of validation is indicative of increased efficacy as feeling validated does support the feeling teachers hold that they can do the job.

Experiences of Professional and Personal Value

Participants identified (a) new learning, (b) freedom to talk, and (c) time to talk as experiences gained through the collaborative group experience that had value to them both professionally and personally.

New Learning

Teachers found value in new learning on both personal and professional levels. They appreciated the opportunity afforded to increase their curricular knowledge, to broaden their knowledge of assessment, to add to their repertoire of teaching skills and strategies, and to exchange ideas and suggestions. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1999) make a case that if society expects " teachers to teach challenging content to learners who bring very different experiences and conceptions" (p. 376), then the capacity of the practitioners' needs to connect in expert ways to what students know and to how they learn most effectively. Teachers in this study realized that the kind of new learning gained through the collaborative group was not only adding to their professional abilities but also enabling them to connect to their students in powerful ways.

Teachers recognized that having this new knowledge, while helping them do their job in the present could have some personal benefit in the future. If they were seeking either advancement within the jurisdiction, or a position in a jurisdiction outside of NSD, the knowledge of assessment practices and in particular the process of performance assessment would give them the edge in the employment marketplace.

Life-long learning is universally supported as the ideal to which teachers, students, and society generally ascribe (OECD, 1996). Through their involvement with the

collaborative group, teachers had the opportunity to actively demonstrate this principle to their students and derived some satisfaction from this process.

This appreciation of the opportunity for new learning by the teachers in the collaborative group underscores their own sense of professionalism. Lieberman, Saxl, and Miles (2000) reported that for teachers engaged in leadership roles, self-learning, both in terms of new skills, techniques, and strategies for their work with students, and also for learning about themselves and their individual strengths, were of primary importance in their experiences in school leadership roles. They were able "to stretch both intellectually and personally" (Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, p. 352). They go on to explain,

> although teachers spend most of their time facilitating for student learning, they themselves have few people facilitating for them and understanding their needs to be recognized, encouraged, helped, supported and engaged in professional learning. Perhaps this is what we mean by "professionalizing" teaching. (p. 352).

Teachers' responses indicated that they recognized the need for knowledge for their practice from many sources and saw the opportunity provided by the collaborative group as a way to translate their new learning into more effective classroom outcomes for students and for themselves.

Freedom To Talk

Teachers appreciated the freedom to talk to others outside of their school environment about matters of professional interest and subjects of personal interest. They made the distinction between themselves as a classroom teacher and as a person, and they valued the freedom to offer potentially controversial professional opinions and explain personal convictions away from their position on the staff of a particular school.

Trust in one's collaborative partnerships has long been established as critical to successful collaboration (Costa & Garmston, 1994; da Costa & Riodan, 1996). In examining teachers' perspectives on what makes a principal trustworthy, Kupersmith and Hoy (1989) list responsibility for ones' own behaviour, the perception of the principal as a person first, with the job role as secondary, and the demonstration of non-manipulative action by the principal. The degree of trust and freedom to talk reported by teachers in the collaborative group shares similarities with their findings. The collaborative group provided a forum where there were no pre-conceived notions of beliefs or opinions, but an understanding that there was a perceived similarity by others of some belief, knowledge or strength that had brought this group together. Teachers enjoyed being valued for their "personhood," as Debra described it, as well as for their professional contributions. They appreciated discussing hobbies, reading interests, and having other individuals appreciate them as persons with interests and lives and hopes and dreams outside of their professional world. This was not to say that a school environment did not provide this opportunity. Most participants mentioned close personal friendships with members of their own school staffs. The difference was that this personal interaction was able to take place at the same time as the professional relationships were developing. Teachers were working closely with other adults for the duration of each of the collaborative group meetings rather than seeing adults for brief periods of time during a day, as happens at school because the majority of a teacher's time is spent with students. This sense of freedom, to "float" emerging thoughts about topics such as their teaching practices, their sense of professionalism, community relationships, and intercultural relations was limited to the collaborative group meetings. This feeling of trust to be

frank, and perhaps controversial, had few consequences attached to it; there was no perceived manipulation or sense of hidden agendas.

The interview participants maintained they did not engage in such frank conversation at their own schools. Conversations and musings about community and intercultural relationships would be difficult to engage in with other teaching staff in the context of the school because of the presence of paraprofessional staff from the community. This is not to suggest there were barriers between teachers and community-based paraprofessionals. When teachers wanted to know something specific about particular community happenings, or why things were done in a particular way, they did not hesitate to ask the staff from the community for clarification. The discussions in the collaborative group had more of a sociological-anthropological aspect, as the teachers had a forum for discussing their observations of differences in culture and behaviours in a setting that was secure in the sense that queries could not be overheard and perhaps misconstrued by other staff.

It may be that the tie binding the collaborative group together was the shared work. Joint work (Little, 1990) in intra-school collaboration is one of the many purposes suggested in the literature, and is listed as high on the continuum as a means for successful collaboration. Joint work can be more of a risk to the individual as autonomy is relinquished. However, having a joint project may deflect this sense of individual risk. The focus on creating a product took the emphasis away from an individual, and allowed the teachers involved a focal point to develop the initial trust necessary for the ensuing intimate trust and freedom to discuss a variety of topics and subjects that developed in the group. da Costa and Riordan (1996) reported that teachers found it easier to share ideas

on sensitive topics after four or five months of collaboration than initially. The collaborative group meetings took place over a school year, so there was duration of time to allow trust to develop. In the collaborative project group in this study, the sense of freedom to discuss sensitive issues and opinions was present from the first meetings of the group.

Time To Talk

Closely linked to freedom to talk was time to talk. Participants felt that being away from the normal routines of teaching, supervision, and personal lives allowed them to reflect on their practice, to discuss strategies, and "really talk to colleagues" about subjects of professional and personal interest.

Schools are busy places. Discussing restructuring in schools, Hargreaves (1995) acknowledges that teachers can become "captives of their schedule" (p. 14). When time to talk and collaborate is not available, collaborative discussions become add-ons at the end of a busy day. In the course of a school day, teachers have a myriad of tasks, duties, and assigned time that leave very little opportunity for moments of chatter over coffee. Even though the work they were engaged in was demanding, participants found the time away from their professional demands and their personal commitments to talk to others was refreshing and valuable.

Experiences of Personal Value

Increased confidence, a deeper understanding of the complexity of NSD, and the holding of information others in NSD were not yet privy to were experiences collaborative group members reported as being personally valuable to them. Knowledge

of information not in the public domain is included in the previous discussion of professionalism and professionalization.

Increased Confidence

Participants reported increased self-confidence in their application of teaching strategies, and in their knowledge of performance assessment practices and assessment practices. Over the course of the four meetings, field notes and observation, as well as interview transcripts demonstrate increased confidence in participants' ease with the terminology and philosophy of assessment practices. Considerable time at each meeting was devoted to inservice sessions designed to provide the collaborative group members with the knowledge and expertise required to carry out the work of the committee.

The opportunity to present the performance assessment packages to others at the jurisdiction inservices confirmed and enhanced this confidence. Little (2000) in an analysis of areas where teachers may demonstrate leadership in schools includes the organization and leading of inservice education as one of the six areas. She states, "teachers who lead leave their mark on teaching. By their presence and their performance, they change how other teachers think about, plan for, and conduct their work with students" (p. 398). Initially some group members were reluctant about teaching their peers, but most found the experience exhilarating and rewarding. It reinforced their feelings of competence in the area of assessment. As Nancy expressed it, "We know our stuff." They spoke confidently to others about teaching practices and strategies employed successfully by them.

Of the 17 member collaborative group, all but 3 members provided some type of inservice to other teachers in NSD, either at large group sessions, smaller regional

sessions, or in their own schools. None of these 3 teachers returned to the collaborative group in the following school year. For the teachers who led inservice sessions, the confidence in and commitment to the project may be a motivator to continue the work of the committee or it may be as Stein and Wang (1988) concluded, that their enhanced expertise in the work of the committee encouraged them to persist with their work, while the teachers who did not participate in inservice leadership opportunities lacked the expertise and therefore the self-efficacy to return.

While an increase in levels of confidence was personally rewarding for the members of the collaborative group, there were benefits to the jurisdiction from this as well. The confidence and conviction evident in their belief in the work of the committee and the use of the materials they developed positively affected the adoption of the performance assessment materials advocated by NSD by teachers in the field. As most schools were represented on the collaborative group, members were able to respond to questions at their schools and continue to build their personal confidence in their understanding and belief in their work. While the collaborative group organizers advocated that group members be ambassadors for the project, the degree to which group members embraced this idea and promoted their work with their teaching colleagues was gratifying to jurisdictional administration and unexpected by project leaders.

The meetings of the collaborative project group, the inservice provided by the group organizers and outside presenters, the collaborative techniques modeled by the group organizers, the collaborative techniques displayed by group members, and the inservice delivery skills learners by the collaborative group members represented a large body of leadership skills that collaborative group members could apply in their own

school settings. In future years, these skills may translate into curriculum or administrative leadership for the jurisdiction.

Deeper Understanding Of The Jurisdiction

While NSD is not a large jurisdiction in terms of teaching staff, employing 232 teachers in the 2000-2001 school year, it is huge geographically. The size of the jurisdiction and the distance from one school to the next contributes to a lack of understanding and awareness of the work of others in the organization. For many of the group members, attending the collaborative group meetings was the first time they had ever been to the central office administration building. They found seeing what other staff does on a day-to-day basis enlightening in terms of their understanding of the magnitude of operation of a school jurisdiction such as NSD. Getting to know people, rather than names on a staff list helped collaborative group members personalize the work that is carried out and they increased their understanding of how jurisdictional business operated.

While the literature is silent in the matter of how enhanced knowledge by staff in remote schools about the workings of the jurisdictional organization affects or enhances staff understanding of their place and role in the organization, parallels may be drawn to the body of literature on parent involvement in schools. The benefits of creating partnerships in business and community ventures are well established. A partner can bring resources, different but complementary expertise, and a fresh perspective. School principals recognize the value in creating positive relationships with parents (Dufour & Eaker, 1995). When parents are active advocates of a school, they can provide support and influence to the community as a whole. Many principals believe that the more

parents know about the school and the programs, the goals, and rationales, the better informed they are to give their support, both financial and verbal, and to defend school issues in the larger community. Parents, because they are part of the community, but also part of the school, can provide a perspective to the community about how the two interconnect, and can become powerful allies in support of school initiatives. When parents receive frequent communication from their child's school, involvement increases, and their attitudes to the school and its programs improve (National PTA, 1997).

For teachers working in small communities, away from the rest of the work force, it is easy to de-personalize what others do, and be critical of what they do not understand. Seeing these people as individuals, talking to senior administration, and watching the operation, helped make the participants feel part of the organization and gave them a deeper understanding of the jurisdiction they worked for. They felt more positive about the jurisdiction because they were better informed and were able to support and defend jurisdictional initiatives and goals as partners rather than as employees.

It can be concluded that participants found nine specific experiences valuable for the reasons outlined. Teachers find outside experiences as those provided by the collaborative group useful and enriching to their view of themselves both as professionals and as persons.

Factors Necessary for Successful Collaboration

Participants in the study identified eight factors necessary to support their participation in the collaborative project group. These were (a) school administrator support, (b) some support from school staff, (c) agreeable arrangements for students left behind, (d) a belief in the work and purpose of the committee, (e) some autonomy in

decision-making regarding the content of the material developed, (f) congenial working groups, (g) amenable travel and accommodation arrangements, (h) and time to socialize with other group members. Friend and Cook (2000) suggest two categories of factors necessary for intra-school collaboration. Defining characteristics include (a) voluntary participation, (b) parity among participants, (c) establishment of mutual goals, (c) emphasis on shared responsibility and decision making, (d) shared resources, and (e) accountability for outcomes. Emergent characteristics under the Friend and Cook model include (a) trust, (b) collaboration is valued for what it is, and (c) some sense of community evolves. Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994) in describing professional development schools list the following items as characteristic of successful collaboration within a school. They are (a) mutual self-interest and common goals, (b) mutual trust and respect, (c) shared decision making, (d) clear focus, (e) manageable agenda, (f) commitment from top leadership, (g) fiscal support, (h) long term commitment, (i) dynamic nature, and (j) information sharing and communication. These characteristics have much in common with the factors teachers in this study believed were necessary for their successful collaborative experience in the collaborative group described in this study, comprised of teachers from different schools, but united by a common purpose.

These eight factors identified by teachers are discussed in the following sections under the two broad categories of school related factors and collaborative group related factors. Similarities and differences to characteristics in both the Friend and Cook (2000) and Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994) models are compared.

School Related Factors

School administrator support, some support from school staff, and agreeable arrangements for students left behind were the three reasons related directly to their schools that participants identified as necessary to support their involvement in the collaborative project group. Agreeable arrangements, or the concern that students' programming and instruction was not compromised by the teacher's absence has been discussed previously under the heading of "professionalism".

School Administrator Support

That successful collaborative undertakings in schools and school change have the support of a school leader such as the principal is well supported in the literature (Friend & Cook, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1992). That a collaborative undertaking such as the collaborative group project, a jurisdictional project, external to any particular school, described in this study relied so extensively on school administrator support is not documented and there are few sources of legitimization and support for cross institutional collaboration (Berry & Catoe, 1994) such as this collaborative group project. Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994) suggest "institutional leaders can assist the effort [of school-based collaborations] by giving legitimacy to this work…especially the resource of time away from the traditional work of the organization while the future work is being invented" (p. 214). All participants acknowledged administrative support as necessary for their initial interest and continued success with the committee. It is clear from the discussion from participants related in the previous two chapters that school administrators provided sustained support to collaborative group participants from the

initial encouragement to participate, or represent the school on the committee, to continued involvement during the year.

Why the principals supported their teachers in their participation in the group was explored only from the point of view of the participants. Reasons teachers believed their principals supported and encouraged them to participate included an emerging interest in the role of performance assessment techniques by the principal (Debra), the desire for school representation at a particular grade level, (Larry), and a desire to have a school staff member on the collaborative group committee (Ruth). Because the assessment materials and the work of the committee has a high profile in the jurisdiction, school principals could feel compelled to nominally support members of their staff in their work on the collaborative project group; pragmatic support rather than philosophic support. Participants did not believe this was the case. Their comments suggest they believed their principals were philosophically in support of their work on the collaborative project group, and the use of the materials produced in the jurisdiction. Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994) list commitment from top leadership as necessary for intra-school collaboration, but it appears from the impressions of teachers in this study it is just as necessary for collaborative projects of this kind, involving teachers from several different schools across a school jurisdiction.

Whether or not principals themselves were aware of how much their support meant to the collaborative project group was not determined. It is clear to me on the basis of the discussion in the previous chapters that if the principals in NSD had not provided the support and the encouragement that interview participants reported, the collaborative project group would not have enjoyed the success that it did.

No one mentioned that the school administrator could be instrumental in the formation of a similar group at their own school. It is possible that the specific nature of the assessment work they were engaged in precluded them from seeing their school principal in a professional development or instructional leadership role.

Supportive School Staff

Data discussed in the findings chapters attesting to the support participants attributed to their own staff at their schools indicate that participants needed to feel that their school staff was, at worst neutral, and, at best, in total support of their work on the collaborative group committee and of the materials they were creating for use in the schools. This is consistent with findings reported in a longitudinal study of individual teacher collaboration (Sawyer, 2001). The teachers involved stressed that support from other department or school staff was essential to them, even though the respondents in the study had experienced a variety of responses from outright support to hostile disagreement (Sawyer, 2001).

Staff support varied for all four interview participants from Larry's staff mostly being interested and aware, to interest from some staff members from Nancy's school, to polite disinterest on the part of Debra's staff, to criticism from some teachers on Ruth's staff. Teachers' views of the degree of support evolved over the course of their collaborative work with their peers in the Sawyer (2001) study as well. Factors which may have affected the degree to which the staff at a school supported their staff member's work on the collaborative group committee include the size of the staff, what kind of an ambassador the collaborative group member was for the work of the group, time allotted at staff meetings for reports back to staff on the work of the committee, the

newness of staff to both the school and the profession, and the degree of hardship other staff experienced due to the absence of the collaborative group member at meetings of the group. For all of the interview participants, the support received from their particular school staff was sufficient for them to continue their involvement in the collaborative project group.

Information sharing and communication of progress of the work the collaborative project group was engaged in compares with the Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994) characteristics. Sharing information with staff at schools and believing that staff appreciated in some way the efforts of the collaborative project members was important to the members of the group.

Collaborative Group Related Factors

Participants related five factors necessary within the group for successful collaboration. These factors were: (a) a belief in the work and purpose of the committee, (b) autonomy in decision-making processes regarding the content of the material developed, (c) congenial working groups, (d) amenable travel and accommodation arrangements, and (e) time to socialize with other group members.

Purpose And Autonomy

Acceptance and interest in performance assessment, coupled with a personal belief that what they were doing was important for their own students and others in the jurisdiction was necessary for participants in the collaborative project group. Participants were interested in the role assessment plays in the instruction process, and interested in increasing their own knowledge of this process. As they became more personally committed, they were able to become more vocal advocates to others in their school and

in the community. Similarly, Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994) report that mutual self-interest in the collaborative undertaking and common goals for the outcomes were necessary for teachers to participate in school reform initiatives.

Autonomy and control of the task development and design process was critical to participants. If collaborative group members were not the creative minds behind the creation of the materials, they could become "worker bees" to simply format and produce someone else's ideas. Project organizers emphasised that the collaborative group members were the experts in terms of what students at a particular grade level were interested in and responsive to, and the collaborative project group embraced the project as their own and believed in it. Shared decision-making and maintenance of a clear focus was critical in the studies to which Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994) refer.

Congeniality and Social Issues

Riordan's (1996) doctoral dissertation on high school teachers' collaborations concluded that one motivation for engaging in collaborative work with a partner within a school was because the relationships were "fun" (p. 188) and provided opportunities to work with " respected colleagues" (p. 188). Teachers in this study derived great personal satisfaction from working with the members in the collaborative group. However, collaborative group members did not select their collaborative partners; the selection process determined the makeup of the main collaborative group and the individual grade level groups quite randomly. Despite this arbitrary selection process, participants reported the congeniality of their grade level groups and the collaborative group as a whole an important factor in their continued work with the collaborative group. Hargreaves (1994) in his discussion of contrived collegiality offers several characteristics

that this form of collaboration can impose on collaborations within a school setting. Unwittingly, in organizing the collaborative project group, organizers could have sowed precisely the right conditions for a both contrived collegiality and contrived congeniality. From the findings reported in this study, this does not appear to be the case. Teachers enjoyed the relationships they developed in the collaborative project group. They made frequent references to the cohesiveness, the cooperativeness, and the willingness of group members to accommodate individual strengths and interests. They also found ways to negotiate and come to agreement concerning subjects where there was initial disagreement. In other words, they learned techniques and strategies for successful ways to collaborate. The project organizers and other group members modelled some of these both consciously and unconsciously; other strategies they came to on their own. The data do not suggest that participants were aware of the pathways they used to acquire these strategies, but that they did acquire them and attributed the success of the groups to the congeniality of those same groups.

The success of congenial relationships in the collaborative project group away from individual schools may be explained by the notion of "familiarity breeds contempt." Teachers reported feeling a greater degree of freedom to discuss topics of professional interest, controversial topics generally, and issues affecting their schools in the collaborative project group than they did within their schools. The main reason stated for this feeling was that schools have cultures much like family cultures. Once a teacher is established in a role, it is difficult to change his or her opinion. Teachers in NSD live and work with their school colleagues in very small, intimate settings. They see these people every day, and often socialize with them after school hours. So, in a sense, individuals

get to know each other on a level much like a family, and although there is an ethic of care and concern for each other, generalizations are frequently made about beliefs, character, aspirations, and past occurrences based on casual remarks with little consideration for a change in opinion as a result of new knowledge, or growth as a professional or as a person. Teachers perceived it was difficult at the school level to escape these preconceptions. They found that the collaborative group experience acknowledged them as professionals, as individuals, and as teachers in a way that would not be possible at the school. The literature neither supports nor refutes this observation.

The social aspect of the collaborative group meetings was important for the teachers. As mentioned previously, participants enjoyed the wine and cheese focus group evening as a social outing, and not merely as a discussion group to collect data for a research study. The other opportunities provided for socializing were important to participants as they were able to extend professional relationships that had begun through their collaborative work into social relationships that continued after participants returned to their home communities. Tschannen-Moran et al., (1998) called for more study into the area of social persuasion and role of social support in modifying efficacy beliefs. The extension of the professional relationships of the teachers in this study through a social milieu may have provided social persuasion that influenced efficacy for the teachers involved.

For teachers whose workplace is a small remote school, the opportunities to socialize with individuals other than the school staff and other community members are infrequent. Thus the collaborative group meetings became occasions for this to happen.

Collaborative group members appreciated the attention paid by group organizers to travel arrangements, accommodation requests, and meal arrangements. As teachers were working during the regular school week with the collaborative project group, their work was considered part of their normal duties, but lesson plan preparation for students left behind was still required. The project organizers believed that giving attention to these details was a way to demonstrate to collaborative group members that their work and effort was valued and appreciated. While not directly similar to the model being contrasted, parallels may be drawn. Robinson and Darling- Hammond (1994) make reference to appropriate levels of fiscal support. The organizers were firm in their belief that the collaborative group participants needed to have their physical needs well looked after and that participants should be completely reimbursed for travel and meal expenses. The data support the wisdom of this belief.

Suggestions From the Project Group

All through the year, committee members were helpful with suggestions for improvement of both the student performance assessment materials they created, and the processes used to develop the tools. Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994) suggest that long term commitment to collaborative goals and the dynamic, responsive nature of collaborative ventures are important characteristics of successful collaboration. While this study followed the collaborative project group for only one school year, it is currently in its fourth year of operation, with plans to continue and to expand. Suggestions from the collaborative project group participants included:

1. Having more opportunities to interact at social events. Participants enjoyed the initial focus group convened for this study and remember it as an enjoyable social event and not as part of a research study.

2. Being made aware of the names of committee members outside of the grade level groups. Teachers suggested the creation of a contact list of all collaborative project group members be circulated at the first meeting in the new school year, and started their own informal list midway through the year.
3. The creation of a school service document containing all the training materials for teachers, the tasks and scoring guides from previous years assessment materials, and instructional strategies collected from their discussions in the collaborative group meetings and the training sessions for teachers.
4. Specific item writing sessions during the summer. Collaborative group members believed if a pool of tasks could be developed prior to the next years' meetings, valuable time could be gained in matching these tasks to curriculum.
5. A session for administrators conducted by members of the collaborative group demonstrating the process used to create the student performance assessment tools and the process devoted to curriculum alignment.

Teaching Practices and Efficacy Beliefs

This section discusses the changes in practices and beliefs that teachers reported and the changes in teachers' personal teaching efficacy as measured by Gibson and Dembo's (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale. Changes in beliefs and changes in practice are interdependent and are discussed together in conjunction with the literature.

Teacher Efficacy Scale

The data suggest that efficacy beliefs are strengthened and enhanced by participation in the collaborative project group. The initial administration of the TES showed higher personal teaching efficacy scores for teachers involved in the collaborative project group than for other new teachers in the jurisdiction. This may be that teachers who agree to participate in a collaborative group project such as described in this study already possess generally higher personal teaching efficacy levels than other

teachers. The majority of teachers in the collaborative group were female elementary level teachers (n = 13); levels of personal teaching efficacy have been shown to be higher for both female (Guskey, 1982) and for elementary teachers (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Raudenbush, Rowen, & Cheong, 1992).

The efficacy scores reported in this study are not similar to those reported in other studies (Anderson et al., 1987; Cavers, 1987; da Costa, 1991, 1992; and Grimmett & Crehan, 1989), in which the mean score across the five studies was 4.58. The mean score for teachers' personal teaching efficacy scores in the collaborative group, both for the initial and the final administration of the TES were lower at 3.93 and 3.96 respectively.

The administration of the TES appears to raise more questions than it answers. Why are the scores reported in this study different from those reported previously in the literature? Why do the scores for the inexperienced teachers in the collaborative group increase over the course of the year? Other studies (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990) suggest for inexperienced teachers, efficacy scores as measured by the TES initially are higher and decrease by the end of the school year. The collaborative project group comprised experienced and inexperienced teachers as defined earlier in this study. There was little difference in the TES scores for experienced and inexperienced teachers in the October administration. Inexperienced teachers demonstrated higher scores in the May administration and experienced teachers had lower scores in May than in October.

Why did returning group members score lower than the teachers new to the group? While the decline in general teaching efficacy with experience is well documented (Bandura, 1993; Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990, 1993); it

is generally accepted that personal teaching efficacy rises with experience (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Teachers new to the group scored higher in both October and May administrations of the TES than teachers returning to the group, who demonstrated not only lower scores generally, but a decline in scores between October and May.

The interview data support positive changes in the efficacy beliefs of the teachers who participated in this study. It is apparent that a mismatch exists between reported changes in beliefs as described by teachers and changes in personal teaching efficacy as measured by the TES scale.

Efficacy Beliefs

Interview data support positive changes in efficacy beliefs since the inception of the collaborative group project. Strengthening and enhancing the efficacy beliefs of prospective teachers (Housego, 1992; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990) has generated a great deal of research interest, but fostering stabilization or increase in efficacy beliefs in practicing teachers is not documented. One respondent, who met the qualifications for marking provincial achievement exams, initially declined to do so because she felt that she needed more teaching experience in the subject. By the end of the third meeting, she insisted her name be added to the jurisdiction's list of markers because she now believed herself to possess the requisite knowledge and skills. By her admission, her efficacy beliefs had been strengthened.

During interviews, teachers reported that mid-way through the school year they felt on track and in control of their program. Increased confidence in teaching experiences is the result of mastery experiences (Bandura, 1977). The conversations and support from

the collaborative group may convince teachers to persist with strategies they may not have continued without the conversations in the collaborative group.

Teachers believe they have high expectations for student success and are supported in these beliefs by the other teachers in the collaborative project group. Some have increased their expectations for their students based on the experiences and the urging of other members in the group. This supports Ross's (1998) findings that as teachers work together, they may persuade one another of their competence, increasing feelings of efficacy and further stimulating future collegial interaction.

Teachers believe their increased knowledge of the curriculum gained through group discussions has influenced their instructional practices. Successful change requires learning to do something new (Fullan, 1990). As teachers worked with and gained new knowledge of the curriculum, they learned new ways to present it to their students. Furthermore, the new learning was represented in their changed instructional practices.

Several teachers believed they would not be so sure that they were on track if it were not for the encouragement of and discussion with other members of the collaborative project group. Several authors (Guskey, 1988; Ross, 1992; Smylie, 1988) state that teachers with higher efficacy are more willing to implement innovative programs and persist with implementation. The findings from this study suggest that the support from the group enhances existing feelings of efficacy and provides teachers with the confidence to take the risk of attempting strategies suggested by others in the collaborative project group.

Teachers reported changes in their classroom practices they believe have led to better understanding by their students of particular concepts in the school curricula.

While the literature neither supports nor disproves this contention specific to curriculum knowledge, other research has demonstrated that reciprocal feedback among teachers has a substantial impact on implementation of inservice programs (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Little, 1990).

Teachers felt that they would not have come to these changes on their own, or if they did try them it would not have been so early in the year. This supports Bandura's (1986) assertion that the potency of persuasion depends on the credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness of the persuader. The trust developed in the collaborative group may be the encouragement teachers need to make changes.

The return rate to the collaborative group indicates that teachers who do stay with the jurisdiction want to continue their work with the committee. Of the 17 member collaborative group, 10 members returned for the 2001-2002 school year. Whether the opportunity to stay on the collaborative group committee influenced any of the members to stay with the jurisdiction was not established.

SUMMARY

The findings from this study indicate several elements are necessary for successful collaboration in small remote schools. Table 7.1 compares in tabular format the characteristics listed by Friend and Cook (2000) and Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994) as those necessary for successful collaboration within a school and between a school and a university respectively. The third column lists those elements the research presented in this study found to be characteristic of the collaborative group project described. Similar elements between researchers are listed on the same row. A blank cell in the column indicates no common element.

Table 7.1 Comparison of three models of elements necessary for successful collaboration.

ROBINSON & DARLING-HAMMOND (1994) SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY	FRIEND & COOK (2000) INTRA-SCHOOL	Present study INTER-SCHOOL
Mutual self-interest and common goals	Establishment of mutual goals	Purpose and autonomy
Clear focus	Accountability for outcomes	
Shared decision making	Emphasis on shared responsibility and decision making	
Information sharing and communication	Some sense of community evolves	Sense of community
Dynamic nature	Collaboration is valued for what it is	Input from collaborative group
Mutual trust and respect	Parity among participants	Congeniality, collegiality and trust (familiar experiences)
	Trust	
Fiscal support	Shared resources	Amenable travel and accommodation
Long term commitment		Project now in 4th year
Manageable agenda		
Commitment from top leadership		School administrator support
	Voluntary participation	Voluntary and selected participation
		Enhances sense of professionalism

Participants in the collaborative project group required a mutual sense of *purpose and autonomy* to carry out the work of the group. There was shared responsibility for goals and outcomes.

A *sense of community* evolves in the collaborative group from the close work, and sharing of strategies and information.

Collaboration in small remote schools results in *congeniality, collegiality, and trust.* Such collaboration requires contact with people who do the same thing. For teachers in this study that meant that the small grade level groups were comprised of teachers who taught the same grade. There was a legitimacy and credibility of knowledge that came from the shared experience of the same grade level that fostered a sense of trust. Congenial working relationships are as important to the collaborative process as collegial relationships.

Amenable travel and accommodation arrangements and fair reimbursement for travel and subsistence costs are important to teachers when they are asked to travel away from their workplaces for collaborative group work such as the work teachers engaged in during this study.

School administrator support is critical to teachers to initiate and sustain work in a collaborative project group such as the one described in this study.

Going away from the school and the community to participate in a collaborative group experience *enhances feelings of professionalism* for teachers and supports a sense of professionalization for their work.

Collaboration through collaborative project groups such as the one described in this study is a useful means to foster collaborative relationships. This supports Riordan's (1996) claim that collaborative efforts should be directed not only within schools, but also in a horizontal manner across school systems. For jurisdictions such as NSD, the findings from the present study suggest that horizontal collaboration across the jurisdiction may be more effective than collaboration within a school.

The next chapter provides an overview of the entire study. The methodologies used to collect data are summarized, followed by a presentation of the findings. The findings suggest a model that other jurisdictions might consider should they choose to engage in collaborative ventures within their own jurisdictions, and that model is introduced. Then conclusions, recommendations, and implications for both policy and practice, and directions future research could pursue are presented. The chapter closes with some personal comments and reflections on particular elements of the study.

CHAPTER 8

OVERVIEW, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides an overview of the study, a summary of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and further research. The chapter begins with an overview of the purpose and significance of this study, and the methods used to conduct the research. Next, the research findings are presented respective to the research questions posed. The findings suggest a model for successful collaboration in remote school jurisdictions such as NSD and that model is presented and discussed. Then, conclusions are offered relative to the findings. Finally, the implications and recommendations the conclusions hold for future research, practice, and policy are presented. The chapter concludes with my personal reflections about the study.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of the study, the methods employed and a summary of the research findings presented in detail in Chapters 4 through 6 are contained in this section.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the understandings and experiences of teachers in a remote northern school district relative to the primary research question, " How do teachers experience participation in a collaborative group project and how are their beliefs about teaching affected?" Changes in efficacy beliefs as reported through descriptions of change in classroom practice and beliefs over the course of the one-year involvement of the teachers in the collaborative project group contributed

to the description of how teachers in a remote school jurisdiction experience a collaborative group experience.

Significance of the Study

The unique configuration of NSD and the physical isolation of teachers employed in remote geographic areas such as those in NSD, indicate a need for creative solutions to teacher support and professional development. Collaboration as a tool to enhance support within a school has been shown to be very effective in situations where there are sufficient numbers of staff to allow the formation of collaborative groups with some common thread (Little, 1982, 1999; McLaughlin, 1993). Few opportunities exist for teachers in small rural schools to discuss teaching strategies, curriculum, or other topics of a professional nature, or to speak and collaborate with teachers who teach similar subjects or grades. The role of social support, as provided by participation in a collaborative project group, in nurturing and stabilizing efficacy beliefs of teachers whose workplace is a small remote school is a topic that deserves scrutiny.

This study has practical significance in its implications for mentoring teachers new to the profession, providing inservice opportunities in isolated areas, and promoting and enhancing efficacy beliefs in the teaching force. The creation of a model of horizontal collaboration in a remote school jurisdiction holds theoretical significance in the articulation and development of a model that may be applied in similar situations. The leadership skills learned through the activities of the collaborative experience are useful skills for the collaborative group members when they return to their own school settings. Collaborative experiences such as those provided by a collaborative project group, can

provide a powerful model for staff development and a structure for increasing retention of staff in remote in jurisdictions such as NSD.

Method

Data were collected from several sources in this qualitative study. First, four teachers, who were part of a collaborative project group engaged in the development of performance assessment tasks for NSD during the 2000-2001 school year, participated in four rounds of interviews. These interviews followed each of the four meetings of the collaborative project group. As well, all teachers new to NSD in the 2000-20001 school year and all teachers in the collaborative project group were asked to complete the personal teaching efficacy questions derived from Gibson and Dembo's (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES). During the first meeting, a focus group comprised of the entire collaborative project group was convened. The focus group meeting provided information to all those involved about the purpose and the procedures of the research being undertaken and the ensuing discussion helped in the refinement of the questions asked during the individual interviews.

The four individual interview participants were purposefully selected from the 17-member collaborative project group. The participants selected represented a range of teaching experience, and familiarity with the jurisdiction, and were all new members to the collaborative project group for the year in which the study occurred. Interviews were conducted following each of the four meetings of the collaborative project group over the course of the 2000-2001 school year. An interview schedule was developed for the first of the interviews; subsequent interviews employed a semi-structured, open-ended format to maximize the richness of the responses and to allow each participant to fully describe

his or her experience relative to their involvement in the collaborative project group. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Summaries of the preceding interviews were provided to each participant at the beginning of the second round of interviews and for each round thereafter. The interviews provided data that were coded into emerging themes related to the research questions.

Two administrations of the TES occurred, a pre-test in October and a post-test in May. Surveys were mailed to all teachers new to NSD in September of 2000 and to the members of the collaborative project group. The data gleaned from the two administrations of the TES were employed descriptively as additional elements to the study's exploration of teacher efficacy.

I maintained a research journal throughout the duration of the study to record my thoughts, reflections, and emerging insights. I relied on two colleagues within the jurisdiction as a means of confirmation for my emerging conclusions from the data. Both had extensive experience with NSD, and one was also involved as a leader in the collaborative project group and served as a "critical friend" (Costa, 1993) to ensure that my insights were supported in the collaborative group experience. Member checks were conducted with each of the interview participants. As each of the final five chapters was completed, a draft was mailed to each interview participant to confirm my interpretations and to provide them with the opportunity to exercise veto rights over any part, if they wished. As well, a final pre-oral version of the findings and conclusions was mailed to each participant to ensure their concurrence with my interpretations, conclusions and recommendations and to again provide them with the opportunity to exercise veto rights, should they so desire.

Summary of the Research Findings

The major findings of the study are summarized as responses to the research questions. The central purpose of the study was to understand how teachers experience participation in a collaborative project group and how their beliefs about teaching were affected. This understanding was explored through six research sub-questions, which are addressed below with the findings related to each question summarized.

1. While participating in a collaborative group project, what experiences were valuable to teachers and why were they valuable?

The experiences teachers found valuable to them through their participation in the collaborative project group included: (a) the opportunity to discuss familiar experiences with other individuals who understood and had had similar experiences, (b) increased curricular knowledge, (c) an increased sense of both professionalism and professionalization, (d) the time to build both collegial and congenial relationships, (e) the opportunity to undertake new learning of a professional nature, (f) a deeper understanding of the operation of a geographically large and diverse school district, (g)access to decision making and information not readily available to all teachers in the jurisdiction, and (h)a sense of increased confidence in themselves as teachers and learners.

2. How was the experience of participation in a collaborative group project different for *experienced* teachers than for *inexperienced* teachers?

The experience of the collaborative project group was different for each individual involved. The differences teachers reported were related to individual preference and

importance, and not because of the extent of experience a teacher had had in the classroom.

3. What factors are necessary for successful collaboration for teachers whose workplace is a small remote school?

Teachers identified support of the school administrator, assurance that programming for students was consistent during their attendance at collaborative group meetings to when the teacher was present, belief in the work and purpose of the collaborative project group, autonomy in decision making that involved the work of the collaborative project group, congenial working groups, agreeable travel and accommodation arrangements and fair reimbursement for any costs accrued, and time to build both collegial and congenial relationships as factors necessary for successful collaboration in a collaborative project group such as the one described in this study.

4. What changes do teachers report in their classroom practice because of the collaborative group experience?

Teachers reported changes in both the way they conducted their classroom practice and in their beliefs about teaching. An enhanced understanding and knowledge of curricula, better application of pedagogical principles, the opportunity to try proven strategies, the modeling of successful techniques and strategies, increased expectations for students, and an increased sense of responsibility for student learning were changes reported in practice. Changes in beliefs included a growing awareness of the importance and role of curricula, recognition and acknowledgement of personal preconceptions about Aboriginal learners, a disruption in teachers' sense of complacency, and an enhanced belief in individual personal teaching efficacy.

5. How do teacher efficacy beliefs change with participation in a collaborative group project?

Teacher efficacy beliefs as described by teachers are strengthened and enhanced through participation in a collaborative project group. Teachers feel more in control of their classrooms, feel better able to persist with strategies that others report as successful, have increased expectations for students and increased expectations for themselves as teachers. The social support of the collaborative project group supports and strengthens the efficacy beliefs of teachers. Teachers have an increased sense of both professionalization and professionalism.

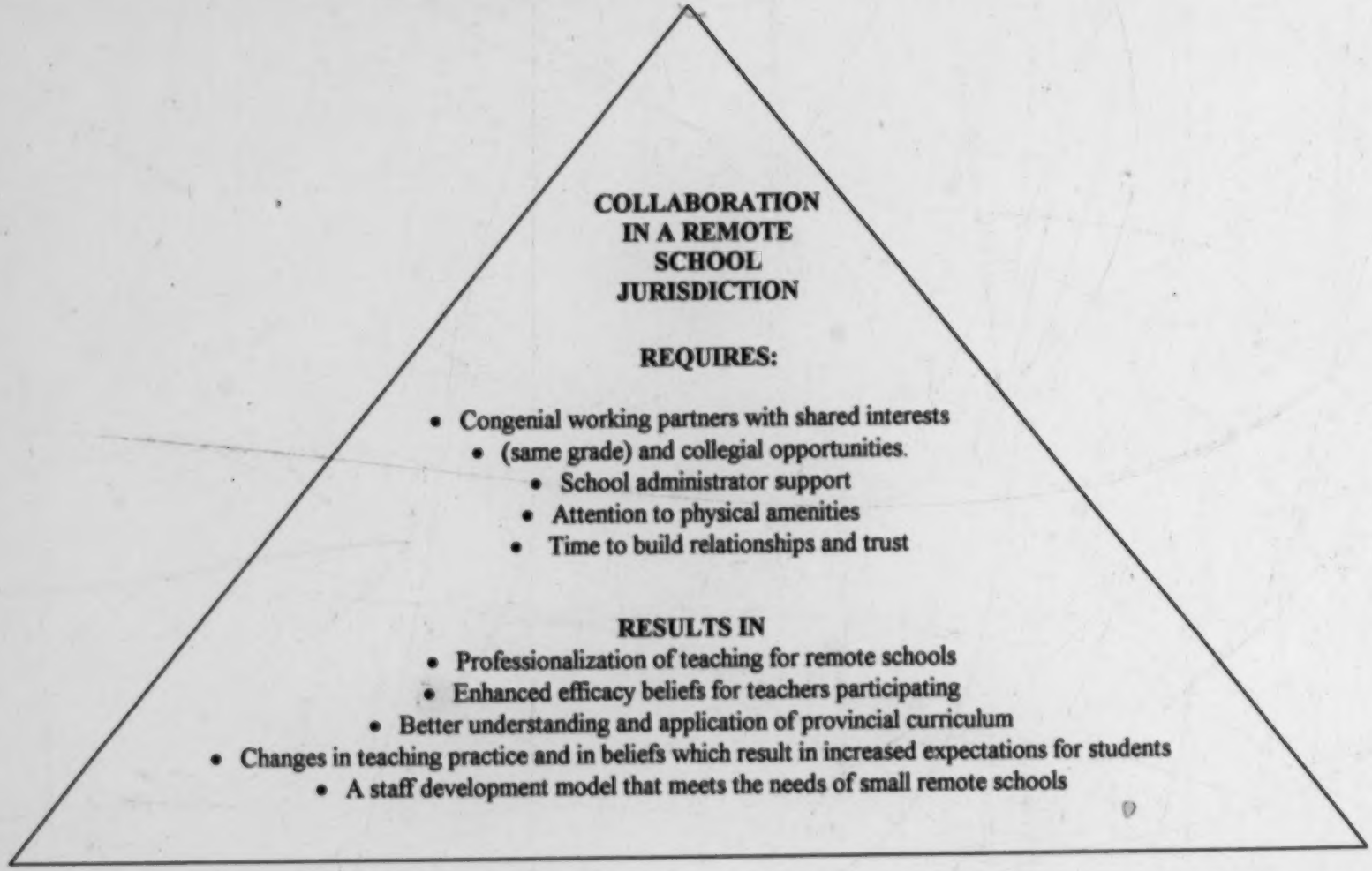
6. What changes occurred in efficacy beliefs as measured by the TES?

Changes recorded by the two administrations to the two groups of teachers were descriptively interpreted and pose more questions than they answer. The scores demonstrated by both groups surveyed, the teachers involved in the collaborative group, and the teachers new to the jurisdiction were lower than scores reported in other studies (Anderson et al., 1987; Cavers, 1987; da Costa, 1991, 1992; and Grimmett & Crehan, 1989). There was little difference in the TES scores of the experienced and the inexperienced teachers in the October administration of the TES. However, inexperienced teachers demonstrated higher scores in the May administration than their more experienced counterparts. The greatest change demonstrated by any group was by the inexperienced teachers in the collaborative group and the group of teachers new to the jurisdiction and not part of the project group.

Collaborative Model for A Remote School Jurisdiction

The findings present a picture of how teachers in a remote school jurisdiction such as NSD experience collaboration in a collaborative project group comprised of teachers from schools across the jurisdiction and suggest a model of collaboration in a school jurisdiction such as NSD where schools are small and do not have multiple classrooms of the same grade, where schools are separated by large geographic distances, where curricular inservice opportunities are not as accessible as in more urban areas, and where students are of a different cultural background than the majority of teachers. Through the examination of the experiences they reported as valuable, the factors they believed necessary to their successful collaboration, and the changes they reported in their teaching beliefs and practice, a model for collaboration for a remote school jurisdiction emerges. This model is presented in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1 Collaboration in A Remote School Jurisdiction


COLLABORATION
IN A REMOTE
SCHOOL
JURISDICTION
REQUIRES:
• Congenial working partners with shared interests
• (same grade) and collegial opportunities.
• School administrator support
• Attention to physical amenities
• Time to build relationships and trust
RESULTS IN
• Professionalization of teaching for remote schools
• Enhanced efficacy beliefs for teachers participating
• Better understanding and application of provincial curriculum
• Changes in teaching practice and in beliefs which result in increased expectations for students
• A staff development model that meets the needs of small remote schools

Conclusions

From the findings, ten conclusions emerge related to both practice and policy. They are listed below with reference to the specific research question from which they are derived. Although professional development opportunities are available to teachers in NSD, few are tailored to the particular community dynamics experienced by teachers there. Those dynamics include language development issues, limited English proficiency of both adults and children in the community, small schools, geographically isolated communities with predominantly Aboriginal populations, teaching assignments which can be outside of teachers' training path because of the small size of schools, and distance from support services and major centres.

1. Small schools do not provide the same opportunities for collaboration that activities external to the school and devoted exclusively to a common activity do. As the findings relative to Research Question 1 suggest, teachers found the experiences of the collaborative group useful. Time to thoroughly discuss subjects of interest and to listen to another relate the happenings in a class, or describe techniques that are successful, is at a premium in most schools. For the teachers in this study, the opportunity to be part of a group with colleagues who taught the same grade, in a location external to the schools in which they taught, enhanced their collaborative experience.

2. Teachers find such outside experiences as the collaborative group useful and enriching to their own instructional practice and their view of themselves both as persons and as professionals. As pointed out in the section in which findings

relative to Research Question 1 were presented, going away from the school environment and working with other adults contributed to feelings of professionalism for the teachers involved in the study as well as an increased sense of professionalization.

3. The deeper understanding and awareness of the jurisdictional as a whole enabled teachers to better understand, support, and defend both the work of the collaborative project group, and other NSD initiatives. In response to Research Question 1, the findings demonstrate an increased sense of confidence and awareness of the jurisdiction as a whole. For teachers in jurisdictions such as NSD, this knowledge of the larger jurisdiction, aside from their own school, fosters a sense of belonging that may have implications for retention of staff.

4. The support offered at the school level by administration was necessary for teachers in the collaborative project group. In response to Research Question 3, the findings indicated that school administrator support was critical for the members of the collaborative group. School administrators need to support and encourage teachers' involvement in collaborative groups such as the one described in this study in a variety of ways as demonstrated in the research findings

5. Changes in beliefs about teaching and in teaching practices contributed to increased expectations for student learning. As pointed out in the section in

which findings relative to Research Question 4 are presented, teachers reported both an increased sense of responsibility for student learning and increased expectations for student performance. With the support and encouragement of others, teachers were able to better articulate student expectations, persist with strategies they had attempted but were unsure of long-term effectiveness, and gain a sense of being on track and in control of their particular teaching environment.

6. As a staff development model to promote lasting change and work force stability, a collaborative project group such as the one described in this study is practical for districts with similar conditions as NSD. Teachers, in response to Research Question 4, reported changes they deemed positive in both their beliefs and in their classroom practices. They believed they would not have made the changes in their classroom practices they reported as quickly or as confidently without the support of the collaborative project group. Of the 17 members, 10 teachers returned the following year to continue with the work of the group and to further develop their collaborative relationship.

7. Collaboration is a useful tool for stabilizing and enhancing efficacy beliefs. Through the findings reported under Research Question 5, efficacy beliefs as described by teachers in this study were strengthened and enhanced. The role of social support encourages teachers to try things they either had not thought of or were reluctant to attempt. When others report success with a particular strategy or technique, the trust established through the sustained support of the group

encourages teachers to try the new strategy, or persist when previous attempts have been less than satisfactory.

8. The teachers learned valuable leadership skills from the modeling that occured by jurisdictional leaders in the collaborative project group sessions, as well as from the opportunities to lead inservices on topics related to the work of the group. As suggested in the discussion related to Research Question 5, the autonomy and control of the collaborative process afforded to the teachers involved, combined with the leadership demonstrated and modelled by the collaborative group leaders, allowed leadership skills to flourish for the teachers involved. Opportunities to practice and learn leadership skills are few in small remote schools. These leadership skills can then be employed in the school setting for intra-school collaborative ventures, or for other leadership situations arising in schools.

9. Results suggest that for jurisdictions with similar characteristics to NSD, the formation of an ongoing collaborative project groups such as this one is an effective way to conduct staff development. Teachers do build professional relationships with their colleagues through group work. Social support does encourage teachers to try new strategies, attempt new techniques, and re-attempt strategies that they tried before which had not met with success. Social support enhances and supports feelings of efficacy. Teachers enjoyed working with other individuals from both collegial and congenial perspectives.

10. The findings reported relative to Research Question 6, the administration of the TES, were not expected and at odds with the changes in efficacy beliefs described and explained by teachers through the interview transcripts. Speculation about the reasons why this occurred suggests several possible explanations. The discrepancy between reported changes in beliefs and practice as explained by the teachers during the interviews and the scores the collaborative project group demonstrated on the TES are perplexing, particularly for the experienced teachers in the collaborative project group. Their scores dropped slightly between the October and May administrations of the TES. It may be that the intense focus on and discussion about changes in practice and beliefs encouraged during the collaborative group meetings caused the teachers to think about and analyze their teaching in a more contemplative and reflective manner than they had engaged in for some time. This concentrated reflection on practices, habits, and philosophy may have raised some doubts about their personal teaching efficacy for these teachers. Carter (2002) reported that, " the 'intervention' of the research project contributed to the processes of reflection" for teachers in mentorship programs and observed that after a period of time teachers came to view teaching as problematic rather than something that they knew completely. Discussion in the collaborative project group allowed the opportunity to present the doubts and either be persuaded that the doubt was not valid or affirm that the doubt was indeed something to consider. When presented with the TES, with its concise questions and little opportunity to apply a lengthy reflective process, teachers may have responded in a way that reflected the doubts in their personal teaching

efficacy, and not the changes that discussion allowed and that the interview transcripts support. The experienced teachers could also have been redefining for themselves what constitutes good teaching (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Change is uncomfortable and difficult. The discussions in the collaborative group prompted changes in the way teachers did their jobs. Implementation of change has been shown (Ross, 1994; Stein &Wang, 1988) to have an initial negative effect on teachers' personal efficacy. The changes the experienced teachers were encouraged to make due to the discussions in the group occurred between October and May. Thus, they were questioning their practices, and feeling challenged, and these feelings may have been reflected in the lower scores of the experienced teachers in the May administration of the TES. For the inexperienced teachers in the collaborative project group and the group of teachers new to NSD but not involved in the group, the increase in TES scores from October to May, while lower than previously reported, (Anderson et al., 1987; Cavers, 1987; da Costa, 1991, 1992; and Grimmett & Crehan, 1989) is consistent with results reported in other studies with beginning or novice teachers (Burley et al., 1991; Hall et al., 1992). It may be that forces that had nothing to do with the collaborative group influenced efficacy scores negatively.

Recommendations

The conclusions presented have implications for both future research and practice. These implications are discussed below in terms of recommendations for future research directions, practice and policy.

Future Research

Teacher Efficacy Scale

The difference in the efficacy scores of teachers surveyed in this study compared with efficacy scores from other studies (Anderson et al., 1987; Cavers, 1987; da Costa 1991, 1992; and Grimmett & Crehan, 1989) is puzzling. From the comments and insights of the teachers involved, it is evident that their sense of efficacy is secure. Why then, were their scores lower than what has been reported previously in other studies with teachers of similar backgrounds, educational levels, and experience? Perhaps teachers in remote school jurisdictions are different from teachers in larger, more urban locales. Perhaps working as a cultural minority produces lower efficacy scores than have previously been reported. Further research with teachers and their work in remote school jurisdictions could examine efficacy beliefs and the relationship with teachers in rural and remote locations, particularly those who work with culturally different students.

Increased Expectations for Students

The social support in the group led to stated changes in both expectations for students and increased understanding of curricula. If teachers are understating better what they are teaching, and if their expectations for students are heightened, it follows that student results may increase as well. Future research might study the link between the stated expectations of teachers involved in collaborative project groups and the results obtained by their students in academic tests.

If teachers are better understanding the intent and purpose of curriculum, further study in the ways teachers make use of these new understandings in their planning and

delivery of instruction for students and its affect on student outcomes would be an area to explore.

Culturally Different Students

For teachers coming into a culturally different community, the reassurances provided by members of a collaborative group may help teachers to realign their expectations and set aside their cultural stereotypes. Teacher expectations of academic performance for culturally different students, particularly Aboriginal would be a subject worth pursuing, particularly in communities such as described in NSD.

Modeling of Leadership Roles

The modeling of leadership roles by the jurisdictional organizers provided the participants with skills and strategies for leading workshops and staff development at the school level. Future studies might follow teachers who have participated in collaborative group activities, to examine what leadership roles they adopt in their own schools. If this link were perceptible, this would present a strong argument to remote or geographically scattered school jurisdictions to institute similar collaborative undertakings to assist with training of future leaders.

It was evident that participants in this study gained both leadership and collaborative skills through their involvement in the group, although the ways and means of the attainment of these skills was not discernable. Lieberman, Saxl and Miles (2000) observe that collaboration and leadership are to a large extent, learned skills. There is gain for teacher leaders because there is significant personal and professional learning for the leaders themselves, and strain because being a colleague and an expert are not easily negotiated roles for teachers in schools (Lieberman, Saxl & Miles, 2000). The

perceptions of teachers of what these skills were, how they believed they attained them and how they used the skills in their own schools would add a rich element to the body of literature on the learning and use of leadership and collaborative skills.

Retention of Staff

Ten members of the 2000-2001 collaborative group continued their involvement for the 2001-2002 school year. This study did not probe as to reasons for return or if there were particular pragmatic reasons for continuing employment with the jurisdiction or work with the collaborative group. Perhaps having a connection with individuals outside of the school community provides teachers with a sense of connection to the jurisdiction as a whole. Future studies might examine the relationship between participation in such a collaborative project group and retention of staff. For jurisdictions with similar characteristics as NSD, the formation of collaborative project groups, which cross school boundaries might be a valuable incentive for the attraction and retention of staff.

School Based Collaboration

The formation of collaborative external groups could be used to model and teach the collaborative skills necessary for in-school collaboration. Further research could determine if participants in this collaborative project group transfer their skills to initiatives within their own school communities. Future studies might consider investigating school based collaborative groups led by teachers who had participated in this collaborative group to determine the extent to which observed skills transferred from the external setting to the school setting.

Administrator Support

It is apparent that support from the school administrator was critical to participation in the collaborative project group. While teachers were aware of this necessity, it is uncertain if administrators were as aware of how their support contributed to the success of the group. A qualitative study detailing administrators' insights and perceptions of their role in support of collaborative project groups such as described would add a dimension to knowledge of how administrators perceive their role in such endeavours.

With the adoption of site based management in Alberta, school administrators are now expected to be much more than the administrative and instructional leader in their schools. They have assumed the roles of building manager, accountant, consultant to local school councils, human resources recruiter and evaluator, public relations consultant, and fund raiser, to name a few. The support the members of the collaborative project group attributed to their principal and so critical to their involvement may be a conscious or unconscious shift of some responsibilities in the principals' domain to able members of staff. Principals may see the opportunity such a group provides as a way to assign instructional leadership and curricular responsibility to other members of staff. Further research into principals' motives for support of a collaborative group activity outside of the school would shed some light on why principals choose to support staff in their collaborative ventures.

Practice

Collaboration as Staff Development

The insights and descriptions provided by the teachers suggest a model for similar collaborative undertakings in small schools, either geographically remote, or with

Aboriginal populations. The insights gained from teachers involved contribute practical strategies to construct a model for establishing and sustaining other collaborative project groups for the purpose of teachers' professional growth. This kind of staff development model could prove very useful to school jurisdictions with concerns similar to the one in which the study was conducted, such as desire for increased student achievement, retention of teaching force, and ongoing jurisdictionally relevant professional development.

Alberta Learning Committee Work

The emphasis collaborative group members placed on comfortable accommodations, attention to travel arrangements and fair reimbursement for out of pocket expenses suggests agencies such as Alberta Learning might examine their practices in recruiting and remunerating teachers for activities such as curriculum committee work or provincial examination marking. At the time of data collection, rates of reimbursement for various committees, contractual agreements, and provincial exam marking vary greatly, with exam marking being considerably lower than other work (personal communication, G. Hall, 07-19-00). It is the expressed philosophy of the branch of Alberta Learning responsible for marking exams, that payment for exam marking does not need to be the same as for other committee work because there is a degree of individual professional development provided by the eight to ten hour days of marking exams. It is apparent that although teachers are aware of and appreciate the opportunity for personal professional development that accompanies activities like developing performance assessment tasks in this study, or marking provincial exams,

being fairly reimbursed for their time and travel contributes to their sense of doing a professional job; their sense of professionalism.

Modeling of Leadership Roles

The modeling of leadership roles by the jurisdictional organizers provided the participants with skills and strategies for leading workshops and staff development at the school level. With many boards concerned about an impending teacher shortage, it will be crucial to find better ways within schools and school systems to nurture, support, and modify teachers' beliefs in themselves, and provide useful professional development opportunities that fit with teachers' work lives. With an aging teaching force, and an impending teacher shortage, it is critical for jurisdictions to grow their own future leaders. Collaborative project groups such as this one provide a supported training ground for future leaders to rehearse and perfect their skills. From the experiences related by teachers in this study, a strong argument is presented to remote or geographically scattered schools to institute similar collaborative undertakings to assist with training of future leaders.

Theoretical Significance

This study adds knowledge to the ability of teacher efficacy beliefs to be sustained, supported and enhanced in a sustained collaborative project group. It suggests that teacher efficacy is a more malleable construct than previously believed (Guskey, 1984; Stein & Wang, 1988; Ross, 1994). The reflections and insights from teachers involved in this study provide knowledge on what a collaborative group experience is like in the setting described for the teachers involved and how this compares and contrasts with what is presently known from the literature.

While the move toward collective efforts, cooperation, and collaboration is certainly present in the educational literature, not much is known about how social interaction supports and enhances teachers belief systems. This study provides important information in this area.

With the focus in Alberta on accountability and on improved student results, many jurisdictions are struggling with ways to provide the skills and tools teachers need in order to help students obtain the results parents and government are demanding. Band run schools, rural jurisdictions, and school districts with significant numbers of English Second Language students may be interested in the findings from this study. The model of collaboration in a remote school jurisdiction presented earlier in the chapter in Figure 8.1 may be of interest to other jurisdictions interested in developing similar staff development activities. There is presently keen interest from First Nations communities, band-run schools, and provincial schools in situations similar to NSD, in the process of performance assessment task development and its influence on student achievement and staff development. This model may be of use in future efforts in this direction.

Personal Reflections

This journey of personal research has answered some questions for me, but, as is the case with most research, it has presented more questions to answer. There are also some issues that while not a part of the purpose of this study hover on the perimeter of the study. I wish to comment on some of these issues

Research in My Own Backyard

I feel very privileged to have been granted the opportunity to conduct my research in the jurisdiction where I work. It enabled me to accomplish several goals

simultaneously: complete my doctoral program, continue with my employment while doing so, and promote the jurisdiction and the communities where I have spent my career. I acknowledge that being closely involved may bias my insights. I have vigorously attempted to examine the issues with dispassionate eyes, to ask questions of others, and to present as accurate a picture as possible of what this experience has been like for the teachers involved. I believe I have attained my goal.

The benefits to my research in my own jurisdiction are immense. The familiarity with circumstances and locations allowed me to quickly access the research site. The lessons learned from the participants could be implemented at once.

Participants were very forthcoming with suggestions for what worked for them and with suggestions for things they felt should be changed. Since I was one of the leaders of the project group, I could consider these suggestions immediately and make changes and adjustments at once if I choose. The suggestions made by participants for the most part enhanced and improved the collaborative group experience, and promoted the belief with the participants that their ideas were worthwhile. If I had been studying a collaborative project group in another jurisdiction, I could report these suggestions, but not act on them with the immediacy I was able to in this study.

Confidentiality and positional power are of primary concern when conducting research as a known personality in a jurisdiction. I was extremely careful to confirm my interpretations with the interview participants and considered Miller's (1990) caution that the questions not asked are as important as the questions asked. In the end, though, I was the researcher and one of the collaborative group leaders. I did my utmost to maintain as equal a power base as possible. I believe I succeeded. The time spent with the group and

with each of the individual interview participants was critical to this occurring. We met and talked as co-researchers and not as the leader and the teachers. Group members were as interested in how the questions I asked played out in my work life as I was in theirs. In that way we were able to cross many of the layers and complexities of understanding to which Miller (1990) refers.

I had proposed that my positional power in the jurisdiction might limit the study and the responses of some of the participants. The opposite occurred. In some instances, by guaranteeing confidentiality to participants, it created a sense of freedom to discuss subjects that skirted ethical considerations. While I was careful to point out the ethical quicksand that particular comments might encounter, participants were well aware I was compelled to honour the confidentiality and security guidelines that bound the study. In this way, I heard some very interesting stories of events unfolding in the schools in the jurisdiction.

What to do in this situation? It primarily served as food for thought. Bound by the ethical guidelines that I promised to participants, I took no actions, but did on several occasions ask some questions I may not have asked had I not listened to their stories.

Stereotypes of Aboriginal Learners

Teachers were able to acknowledge their stereotypes of Aboriginal learners away from their schools, in a situation where the learners were not personalized. There was more time to reflect away from the usual workplace. I think it may be easier to acknowledge personal shortcomings away from the people you work with every day. We live in an increasingly diverse and multi-ethnic world, but cannot help but hold some stereotypes, prejudices and, pre-conceived notions of the world and the people in it.

Teachers are not immune from these biases, just because they are teachers and are expected to help guide children in the creation of their own value systems. It was a valuable experience to the teachers involved in the collaborative group to be able to compare community attitudes, and customs, and to discuss their interpretations of how they, as teachers and outsiders, fit into the particular communities. I believe it was comforting to be able to share their thoughts, and encouraging in that others with greater experience in cross-cultural situations could emphasize that kids are kids and teachers should expect the same of Aboriginal students as they do of any other student.

Teacher Efficacy Scale

The perplexing results obtained from the two administrations of the TES invite speculation. One theory, based only on my personal experience and observation of more than twenty years of the endings of a school year, is that May in NSD is a particularly stressful time for teachers. Hot weather, forest fires, tired children, and days with increasingly long daylight hours, serve as stressors to already burdened teachers. In addition, planning for year-end activities, field trips, final exams, and the completion of projects imposes addition pressures to already full work lives. As a colleague of mine commented, perhaps it was that it was May in NSD and teachers responded in a manner reflecting the stress and pressure they were experiencing then, rather than a manner that reflected positive changes that may have occurred in their efficacy beliefs as measured by the TES. I'll never know, but it is an interesting observation.

Composition of the Project Group

In the previous discussion related to both the congeniality and the collegiality of the project group, I need to note that there were no obvious, visible personality clashes within

the collaborative project group. Whether this was due to good luck, or good management is not known. It may be likely that persons who are by nature very individualistic with preferences to work competitively alone would deliberatively choose not to participate in an experience that is contrary to their preferred way of operation. My experiences from working with a variety of individuals during my career suggest that often persons like this will view an opportunity to participate in a group such as the one described in this study as a way to advance a personal agenda. I do acknowledge that having such an individual involved in this collaborative group project could have completely sabotaged the entire project and torpedoed this study. I was privileged to have such a fine group of teachers to work with.

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Appendix A

Appendix A, Focus Group Letter

Lucinda Jenkins
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Edmonton AB T6G 2G7
September 30, 2000.

To: Collaborative Project Group Member

Dear_____,

You are invited to attend a focus group meeting on Monday October 16, 2000 at 7:30 P.M. in the boardroom of Northland School Division No. 61. The purpose of this meeting is to provide information on a research study that I am conducting around the Performance Assessment Project Group that you have consented to be a part of for the 2000-2001 school year and to hear from you issues you wish to raise regarding your understandings, questions, and opinions about the topic.

The purpose of the research you are being asked to participate in at this meeting is to provide a forum and a focus for topics for me to explore in the interview part of the study. These may include, but not be limited to:

- Why you agreed to participate
- How the project fits with your teaching
- How the project or you participation in the project is perceived in your school by colleagues and by administration, by community based staff
- How groups such as this are helpful to teachers
- What are some barriers for you in a project such as this
- What do you believe participation in such a project will help you do better
- Anything you believe to be useful to the project.

At the meeting, I will provide information on the purpose of the study and the method to be used. Attendance at this focus group meeting is voluntary and your choice to attend or not will not jeopardize in any way your continuing work on the committee. There is no risk attached to your participation in the focus group part of this research study. The meeting will take 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Light refreshments will be served. I look forward to meeting with you on October 16, 2000.

Yours truly,

Lucinda Jenkins

Appendix B

Appendix B, Interview Questions First Interview

Interview Schedule

First Interview, All Participants

1. Why did you agree to participate in this project?
2. Tell me about your classroom.
3. How do you think this project fits with your work in the classroom?
4. Tell me about your school and community.
5. How is your work on this project perceived in your school by your teaching colleagues?
6. How do you think this project fits with your work in the context of the community?
7. How is your work on this project supported in your school by administration?
8. How is your work on this project supported in your school by community-based staff?
9. How is your work on this project perceived in your school by your students?
10. How is work in a group like this is helpful to teachers as a profession?
11. What are some barriers or difficulties for you in a project such as this?
12. What do you believe participation in such a project will help you do better?
13. Can you tell me about an experience or event from the collaborative group meeting that is particularly valuable to you?
14. How has participation in the project changed your classroom practice? Can you give me some examples?
15. Is there anything else you would like to tell me? Something I should have asked but didn't?

Appendix C

Appendix C, Ethics Cover

FACULTIES OF EDUCATION AND EXTENSION
RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

Graduate Student Application for Ethics Review

Name: Lucinda Jenkins **Student ID** 0369781

E-mail: cinjen@telus planet.net

Project Title: Teacher Collaboration in a remote Alberta school jurisdiction

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Project Deadlines:

Starting date September 15, 2000 Ending date December 31, 2001
If your project goes beyond the ending date, you must contact the REB in writing for an extension.

Status:

___ Master's Project ___ Master's Thesis _X_ Doctoral Thesis ___ Other_____
(Specify)

The applicant agrees to notify the Research Ethics Board in writing of any changes in research design after the application has been approved.

L Jenkins Nov 3 2000
Signature of Applicant Date

The supervisor of the study or course instructor approves submission of this application to the Research Ethics Board.

[signature] Nov 3 19 2000
Signature of Supervisor/Instructor Date

ETHICS REVIEW STATUS

___ Review approved by Unit Statutory member/Alternate

_✓_ Review approved by Research Ethics Board

___ Application not approved

[signature] Nov 8 200 0
Signature of REB Member Date

Appendix D

Appendix D, Consent to Participate

Letter of Consent

Lucinda Jenkins
Department of Educational Policy Studies
University of Alberta
Edmonton AB T6G 2G7
[Date]

780-437-0654 (home)
780-751-2410 (work)
cinjen@telusplanet.net

Consent to Participate in the Teacher Collaboration in a Remote School Jurisdiction Study

Dear_____,

Following our recent conversation during which you agreed to participate in the *Teacher Collaboration in a Remote School Jurisdiction* study, I am requesting that you confirm your consent by signing this letter. Two copies are enclosed, so that you can keep one copy for your records.

The purpose of this research is to describe how teachers experience participation in a collaborative group project, to explore how teachers' beliefs about teaching develop and change, and to determine the extent to which efficacy beliefs may be influenced by an extended group experience such as the Performance Assessment Project group.

As a participant in this study you will be interviewed by me up to four times during the course of the 2000-2001 school year at times and locations mutually convenient to both of us. The interviews will be tape-recorded, last from 60 to 90 minutes, and will commence approximately two weeks after the initial meeting of the Performance Assessment development meetings. I will provide you with a list of possible topics for each interview, although we are not in any way limited to those topics. I may ask to observe your classroom to extend my understanding of classroom practices and techniques you mention in the interviews. These observations, if they occur would be with your full consent and at times mutually agreed upon in advance. You will be kept fully informed of the research at all times.

You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time during the course of the study. Audiotapes will be transcribed. I will provide you with summaries of the transcripts after each interview for verification or opportunity to exercise veto rights. You may at any time opt out of the study without fear of penalty. You are also granted veto rights over the summaries and conversations you participate in. Should you decide to opt out of the study, or use your veto rights over particular parts of the

summaries provided, you may do so by calling me at the phone numbers provided, or writing to me. You may also wish to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Jose da Costa at 780-492-5868 or jose.da.costa@ualberta.ca if you have any questions, concerns, or would like to withdraw from the study.

Following the study, you will be provided with a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. References to school names, or individual names will be altered to protect your confidentiality in these documents as well as in the dissertation.

The data and subsequent findings will be used in the completion of my dissertation for the Ed.D program in Policy Studies at the University of Alberta, as well as in conference presentations, journal articles, and inservice presentations. As this study is taking place within the jurisdiction, at the pleasure of the Board of Trustees, a presentation of the findings will be made to the Board. At the end of 5 years, all data will be destroyed.

Please be assured that there are no risks involved by your participation in this study, or by your decision to withdraw from this study at any time. Any decision you should make to withdraw from the study will not jeopardize your continuing participation in the Performance Assessment Project.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your generosity in sharing your time and insights is appreciated. Be assured that this study is as described and includes no deception. I hope you enjoy the process and find it rewarding.

Lucinda Jenkins

I, _____ acknowledge that I consent to participate in the study described above.

Signed: _____

Date_____

Appendix E

Appendix E, Correspondence

Box 129
Grouard AB T0G 1C0
December 6, 2001.

To: Participant

Dear Participant;

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the transcript of the last interview we had. Also enclosed is the first of three, possibly four chapters of findings and discussion that will appear in the final copy of my doctoral dissertation. This chapter is in draft form at present and may undergo significant change by the time it appears in the dissertation.

You will notice that you have been given a pseudonym and your school and position are described in general terms in order to reduce the likelihood that you can be identified. This is standard practice in research of this nature.

I propose to send you each of the three or four chapters as I complete them and then the final draft version of all prior to submission to my examining committee.

While you are reading this material please keep in mind that although you know who you are, other readers will not. While dissertations have a reputation of not being widely read, a copy will be provided to the jurisdiction for its library. Thus it is possible that at some point in the future, a person who may know you or your school may read this document and guess at your identity.

The transcript is enclosed for the purpose of refreshing your memories of the interviews rather than for inclusion in the dissertation. The transcript will contain some typos and misspellings. If sections of the transcript appear in the dissertation chapters, errors will be corrected and standard grammar used in the final product.

Please read this material carefully. You may phone me at home at 780-751-2129 any time or at work at 780-751-2410 after January 6, 2002. You can email me at cinjen@telusplanet.net any time. If I do not hear from you by January 11, 2002, I will assume you have no concerns with how I have used you comments and the interpretations I have made from them. However, I welcome any comments you may have, or any further comments you might wish to make.

I also include a copy of the paper I presented at the AERA conference in Seattle in April. I promised this a while ago. Sorry for the delay!

Thanks for your continued cooperation and interest.

Yours truly,

Cindy Jenkins

Attachments:
-Final interview transcript
-Chapter 4 draft
-AERA paper

Appendix F

Appendix F, Curriculum Vitae

Lucinda Diane Jenkins

Lucinda Jenkins

Box 129
Grouard AB T0G 1C0
Phone 780-437-0654

E-mail: cinjen@telusplanet.net

Education

Doctoral Candidate

1999-Present University of Alberta Edmonton, AB

Department of Educational Policy Studies: Educational Administration and Leadership

Master of Education

1986 – 1987 Mount St Vincent University Halifax, NS
Split specialties in Clinical Reading and Elementary Education

Bachelor of Education

1975 – 1976 Mount St Vincent University Halifax, NS
Elementary Education

Bachelor of Arts

1971 – 1974 Dalhousie University Halifax, NS
Psychology major, double minor, English and History

Awards Received

January, 2000- Graduate Assistantship, University of Alberta

June 1971- Entrance Scholarship, Dalhousie University.

Employment Experiences

1976 - present Northland School Division No.61 Peace River, AB

1988-present Pedagogical Supervisor
I provide on site assistance to teachers and administrators in schools in the jurisdiction. Assistance may be planning, classroom management, legal issues, curriculum updates,

assessment information, supervision assistance to administrators, and in-services and workshops.

1976-1988 Classroom Teacher

I taught grades 1-9 at three different schools, Gift Lake, Grouard, and Atikameg. I taught all subjects, including special education and home economics.

Professional and Educational Activities

Tolerance and Understanding Analyst, Alberta Learning. April 2000

Lead teacher for implementation of provincial English Language Arts Program of Study. April 1998

Collaborative Decision Making Inservice Program, ATA. May 1995

Member of the development committee for the reporting requirements for the English as a Second Language funding initiative of Alberta Learning, 1998.

Organized and chaired school evaluations for Calling Lake and Grouard Schools. Developed Terms of Reference, selected committee members, supervised writing and presentation of final reports. 1990-1992.

Chair of the Northland School Division School Improvement Project, 1998-2001.

Team leader for the Student Learner Improvement program for Northland School Division, including CAMP, Provincial Achievement tests, and Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project (Performance Assessment).

Consultant to Neegan Awas'sak Children's' Services, Youth Assessment Services.

Presentations

October 2001- *The Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project in Northland School Division No.61.* Alberta Assessment Consortium Conference, Calgary, AB.

October 2001- *Performance Assessment in Mathematics: Showing what you know and the Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn project.* MCATA, Edmonton, AB.

November 2001- *The Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project- Promoting Mathematical Understanding In Northland School Division No.61.* Alberta AISI Conference, Edmonton, AB.

November 1998- *Making a Difference for Remote Northern Children.* National Conference for Inner City Education, Edmonton, AB.

October-April 1994- Guest lecturer to Year 2 Social Work students. Grant MacEwan Community College Social Work Program, Grouard, AB.

Professional Memberships and Certification

Permanent Professional Teaching Certificate

American Educational Researchers Association

American Association for Curriculum and Supervision

National Council of the Teachers' of English

International Reading Association

Alberta Teacher's Association

ATA Specialist Councils:

- ESL Council
- Council on School Administration

Publications

Jenkins, L. (2001). *Teacher collaboration in a remote school jurisdiction.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of theAmerican Educational Research Association in Seattle WA. April 10-14, 2001.

Jenkins, L. (1999). *Guide to ESL Programming in Northland School Division.* Peace River, AB: Northland School Division, No. 61.

Jenkins, L. and Penney, K. (1997). *Orientation Handbook for Staff new to Northland School Division.* Peace River, AB: Northland School Division, No. 61.

Community/ Volunteer/ Interests

Salt Prairie Community Association, Secretary-Treasurer		1990-1999, 2001-present
Prairie River Junior High School Parent Council		1997-1998
Local 69 ATA	Treasurer	1985-1986
Co-owner /Operator Lobstick Sheep Ranch		1978-1990

Recreational Pursuits: Canoeing, riding, dog sledding